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### Of citizens and ordinary men: Political subjectivity and contestations of sectarianism in reconstruction-era Beirut

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Marten Boekelo

# OF CITIZENS AND ORDINARY MEN

Political subjectivity and  
contestations of sectarianism  
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Marten Boekelo

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AND  
ORDINARY  
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*In loving memory*

*Elisabeth Boekelo-Noordzij*

*Cisca Noordzij-Valk*

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A

Dear AIOs Anonymous (O.K., not so anonymous: Frank van As, Marieke van Eijk, Marcel van den Haak, Eline van Haastrecht, Sanneke Kloppenburg, Naomi van Stapele, Ana Miškovska Kajevska, and Anick Vollebergh):

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Amsterdam, January 2016

# Notes on language, including but not limited to terminology, transliteration and diacritics

For the transcription of Arabic words I've based myself loosely on the Library of Congress Romanization policies: the 'dash' over a vowel [e.g., ā] indicates the vowel is long; a [ʾ] indicates the guttural squeeze-your-vocal-chords sound graphically represented by the letter [ʾayin-ع], and the [ʔ] for the glottal stop, otherwise known as the Hamza, which I have left out at the beginning of words. To complete the diacritical madness I have included the dots under the so-called emphatic consonants [ḍ], which cost me a considerable amount of work, so the reader is kindly advised to appreciate how orientalistically professional this looks. In line with IJMES practices, however, proper names follow customary spelling, which in Lebanon means French standards (thus, I write Bachoura instead of Bashūra).

Speaking of names: I've chosen aliases for all interlocutors except for those who spoke from a public function. I considered the interviews with the street level bureaucrats called mukhtars semi-public, so I changed their names as well, just in case. One exception is Abu Zalem: I've found a replacement for his personal name, while I retained his war moniker (it's difficult to best 'Father of Darkness').

I'm taking a grammatical shortcut when it comes to designating members of the "Shia" community. "Shia" (or Shī'a) is actually a collective plural in Arabic. Individual members within this collective are designated by the adjective [Shī'i]. That is a pain to write though (especially since Word wants to autocorrect it into this: Shi'I) and it doesn't really look pretty. Shii doesn't fare much better. There is also an accepted anglicized variant, which is 'Shiite'. However, that reminds of me a 1990s movie about watching trains, in which the Scottish variant of a commonly used swear

word was abundantly deployed and, well, it just doesn't feel appropriate. So instead, I'm sticking with Shia throughout. Shia for all of them, Shia for a single individual, and Shia as an adjective. I trust you will welcome its simplicity and forgive the technical imperfection. (Sunni and Sunna sound and write just fine though, so that distinction is maintained.)

Here and there I make a few notes on the post-colony. In this regard, I make an orthographic distinction between post-colonial, which I use to refer to countries that were once colonized (or mandated), and postcolonial, which I use for a particular type of scholarly approach to, among other things, post-colonial societies. That seemed important at the time. (I am aware that others use the same orthographic difference to make other kinds of distinctions, but they seemed tied to unproductive theoretical infighting.)

A final convention I'd like to draw your attention to is that I have deployed two ways of distinguishing quotes from interlocutors. If I have the given quote on tape, I frame the quote with citation marks. If, however, I have not recorded the conversation but written (parts of) it up from memory, I use italics for 'quoted' text. The idea of course is that my memory is not as accurate as my tape recorder and that you might want to know when I'm drawing from either source.

(Oh, and you may be wondering about the difference between sectarian and confessional. There is none. I use them interchangeably. 'Sectarian' carries a rather heavy connotational charge, whereas 'confessional' is a perhaps bit awkward attempt to get away from that. Neither works really well, both are translations of *ṭā'ifi*, and whenever I get tired of either, I switch.)

# Introduction

There were two women, residents of Achrafieh, who arrived, dressed as tourists, as if they were going to visit Yemen, arrived to discover the Zoqaq al-Blat neighbourhood, and I saw Zoqaq al-Blat merchants shocked and frightened by these ladies. [...] There was a certain clash of unknowns and I told myself, if this turns out ok, we'll have accomplished something. And it turned out ok! These visitors (including my mother) are saying to themselves, we don't know the neighbourhood, it's on us now to get to know it. And these residents who were shocked, afraid they would be seen as monkeys or tourist attractions, they realized that these were Lebanese, Beirutis, like them, and they've opened their shops, and their arms, and started telling stories about their memories and tears were shed.

This story narrates events that occurred during a project in 2010 designed to draw attention to and preserve the architectural heritage of the Zoqaq al-Blat neighbourhood in Beirut and to “revitalize” the area through culture and leisure. The aims of the project were thus at once narrow and focused as they were expansive. As concerns the first aim, heritage buildings were under considerable pressure by developers' ambitions to cash in on a real-estate boom and poorly protected by the state. Zoqaq al-Blat however was the seat of a relatively large amount of heritage architecture used by the administrative seats of religious dominations, charity organizations and schools. These buildings were therefore relatively well protected by institutional ownership and upkeep. Hence, this patrimonial ecology seemed the best possible foundation to start working effectively towards preserving heritage architecture. If it wouldn't work here, then probably nowhere. The very fact that all these buildings were there in the first place also relates to the second aim. The area had been the geographical centre-point of the Lebanese contribution to the Arab Renaissance – or *Nahda* – in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Arab culture – education, literature, linguistics – thrived at the time. In the organizers' historical understanding, Beirut – and especially Zoqaq al-Blat – was able to be that place because people transcended religious

difference to create a vibrant, oecumenical public life. That vibrant Beirut was also the kind of Beirut the organizers dreamed of now. The story above – a promotional story in one sense, an aspirational one in another – is meant to capture some of that potential. Bourgeois ladies from a Christian bourgeois neighbourhood (that would at least be the association with “Achrafieh”) came and met plain folk from a popular Muslim neighbourhood (as Zoqaq al-Blat was largely known). The stories that were shared then and the tears that were shed were icons of the organizers’ hope that people – as Lebanese! – would regain a sense of identification with, ownership of, and thus stewardship for the area.

The phrase “they realized they were Lebanese, Beirutis like them” is somewhat baffling though. Could the differences between these two groups of people be so large that Zoqaq residents were unable to properly identify these visitors? Other examples seem to indicate this was indeed the case. Thus, the project organized walking tours along the various patrimonial sites. A friend who had joined one of these tours had had the impression people were quite surprised to suddenly these groups of people moving through the area, groups of people who were obviously not residents. ‘Obviously’, not merely because they formed a congregation of unfamiliar faces, but also because they adorned themselves with quite different styles of dress of what was usual in the area, with the public demeanour of visitors, and most likely they had used French as their main means of communication, mixed in with some Arabic. My friend characterized his entourage as *tontāt* (a Lebanese plural formed on the French word for aunt) from Achrafieh (that is to say, the bourgeois ladies from above), with their delicate heels and their luscious shawls draped over their elegant dresses. As a result, he felt they (including himself, by guilty association) were seen as a (foreign) tourists. And indeed, at several occurrences I heard residents refer to the visitors as “foreigners” (*ajānib*).

The mutual sense of bewilderment is indicative of a tension that is at the core of this thesis. It is a treatise about two worlds – a world of people who consider themselves members of ‘civil society’ and one of people who identify themselves as residents of a ‘popular’ neighbourhood. While there are many ways one could capture the differences between these two worlds – differences of class, education and in part religious community – this thesis focuses on the distinct ways people from each social and political universe conceive of the nation, the state and people’s own citizenship. Locally, especially from the perspective of civil society, these distinct ways were understood as almost antithetical. This had consequences for how far these two sides could really come together and share their stories, for instance in this heritage project. Let me go deeper



into the ideas that informed the project leaders' understandings of who the residents were. These ideas will open up a path from which to set off the exploration of these two worlds.

In a retrospective presentation they gave at the chancellorship of the Lebanese University, the initiator of the project, Serge Yazigi, and his colleague from St. Joseph University, Liliane Barakat, were explicit about their desire for the local population to participate in the project, for their contributions would be essential in accomplishing the two aims of the initiative. However, from the way they both talked about it (both in this and other public meetings as well as in interviews with me), they identified three problems. The first problem is the 'culture' of the residents, that is, of the 'newcomers' to the area, who are at times explicitly identified as Shia. (These Shia had migrated to the area in large numbers mostly as displaced persons during the 'civil war', at the same time as most Christian residents left the neighbourhood.) While Yazigi seemed on one level to be rather agnostic about the kind of 'urban culture' necessary for a vibrant (peaceful and durably profitable) city – waxing poetic at some point about the virtues of the little corners stores and the street life they generate – still in response to questions during the conference that honed in on the 'population question', Yazigi elaborated on a different sense in which he might understand 'urban culture':

The question [of changes to the population since the 19<sup>th</sup> century] is very interesting. [We've gone] from a *very* urbanized population, bourgeois, notable and merchant families, who used to live in the old city, then left the centre to establish themselves in this [suburban] extension and so, despite the gardens [of their villa's] etc., they already had an urban culture. The war has reversed the tendency completely: there's a rural migration of [people] who, by the way, have a great defiance [*défi-ance*] vis-à-vis the city and who are there but do not want to maintain [*entretenir*], they are there, but they are very defiant towards the city. So a wholesale modification – so besides the modification of confessional community and social class.

The conclusion shared by members of the audience, Barakat and perhaps with some nuances, Yazigi as well, was that most of the current inhabitants lack a history with the city, and therefore a sensibility for urban culture, which didn't predispose them to active participation in and appropriation of the project.

The second problem lay in the associational life in the neighbourhood. Or rather, that there was too much of a problematic kind and too little of

the right kind. Thus, Barakat told me that right from the first visit to the area it became clear to that “Hizbullah controlled the area”. No longer had she parked, as someone called Ali<sup>1</sup> came up to her to inquire what she was doing there. She quickly concluded that there were territorial considerations that were going to supersede any concern over ‘heritage’. Fortunately, in the end, Hizbullah turned out to be quite discreet, albeit was eerily so, because “you don’t know who they are”. The other main Shia party, Amal, wasn’t discreet at all and quite cumbersome. “Every time we passed their local office, they badgered us [*faisaient des histoires*]”. In other words, it was difficult building bridges to the parties. Conversely, the neighbourhood lacked the type of associational activity they could have depended on: civil society organizations. In terms of these secular, i.e. non-religious and non-politically affiliated NGOs, Yazigi could only identify one in the area: *Ashghalouna*, a “group of charitable ladies” who organize informal dinners of traditional (regional) Lebanese food prepared by ‘war widows’. They were well aware of other initiatives and organizational forms, like the boy scouts, the educational institutions, various charity organizations, as well as an orphanage. However, these were part of the sectarian world – tied to religious institutions and political parties – and they were perceived more as part of the problem than of the solution. In their experience, these organizations would not be able to create the kind of socially and politically transgressive connections that had made the *Nahda* possible and which would now allow a ‘regeneration of urban culture’ in Beirut.

The reason for this was tied to the third problem: the persisting animosity, fear and competition among the people. Yazigi: “The project presupposes every time an opening of space and mentality to the other, to receive others and [accept] that they enter their space. And that provokes fear and reticence, always”. In connection to this, one topic that came up a few times were the internal and internalized borders. Consider the following example Yazigi gave:

I will tell you an anecdote of the second time we did the tour. A lady arrives, very well dressed, even though most of the people who came were dressed more for tourism, with the hats and the shoes, and then she arrives and says ‘I’m a resident of Zoqac al-Blat’. Ahuh, I say, what

1 In Lebanon, Ali is the Shia name par excellence, because people hear the reference to Mohammad’s cousin Ali, the first ‘Shia’ rival for the throne of leader of the Muslims. The “obvious” connection between the name and Shia identity is not reproduced the whole Muslim (or even the whole Arab) world, however.

is it that you want to do? 'Well, I admit that I don't know the neighbourhood. There are streets that I'm afraid to enter. And I want to take advantage of your presence now to dare and enter these neighbourhoods and discover them. Many of these institutions, their door is closed, I can't enter, I want to explore thanks to you'. And at the end, she was completely flabbergasted at having discovered her neighbourhood – we don't realize to what extent the war has, that we continue to live with the residues of the war that sometimes have no sense anymore but have become the logic of our minds, we internalized them, and gave them an even bigger importance, and we continue to live with it.

Such mentalities also had wider repercussions. The important institutions in the neighbourhood, such as the schools, had also internalized these borders – and rather acted as though they were each other's competitors.

How should we understand the gap between the intentions to involve the population as much as possible, and the subsequent realization that they can't? Yazigi and Barakat situate their failure to engage the population in the context of sectarianism. Sectarianism is for them the heart of the problem and the main obstacle in addressing that problem. It prevented people from coming together in order to save the city's history and create new history worthy of the name. It is unclear however how the residents of Zoqaq al-Blat perceived the problem, and whether they identified similar challenges. This thesis sets out to elaborate on why people in 'civil society' locate the problem in sectarianism as well as how that compares to how people in a 'popular' neighbourhood like Zoqaq al-Blat think about Lebanon's challenges. In short, this thesis seeks to clarify what dreams people have for Lebanon, which shortcomings they identify, and what that means for how they relate to the country's official political system and dominant political culture – sectarianism.

This then is a thesis about political imagination in Beirut. More particularly, it is about how certain Beirutis imagine themselves to be a citizen of Lebanon. The term "imagination" does not of course connote fancy and fabrication, but rather, in the "anthropological spirit" of Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, intends to draw attention to the "styles" with which people understand who they are (Anderson 2006: 6). 'Citizenship' is actually a notion that forms the discursive backbone of one of two styles that I discuss in this book. In order to avoid confusion with the emic use of such a notion, let me rephrase what is at stake conceptually: this

book is about the way people conceive of their membership of the political community. For most people in Lebanon, as for most people in most of the world, that political community is primarily the nation. In Lebanon specifically though, the relation to the nation is mediated by at least two other kinds of political community, a 'larger' pan-Arab community and/or a 'smaller' confessional or sectarian community (what Lebanese call *tā'ifa* in Arabic). While pan-Arabism has been reduced to a status that resembles one to which Gandhi reportedly relegated 'European civilization', sectarian communities are very real and structure people's lives in pervasive ways. Unsurprisingly then, most of the 'imaginative' tension in this book occurs in and around the intersections of nation and sectarian community.

For the reader yet to be initiated in the multiverse that is Lebanese political life, 'sectarianism' (*tā'ifiya*), at its most basic level, is the integration of religious communities – Lebanon recognizes eighteen of them – into the state. The distribution of political voting power as well as posts in the state's bureaucracy occurs through the communities and is calculated on the basis of (a more or less fictional notion of) their relative sizes. Also, a considerable part of civil law is administered through community courts. In addition to these politico-juridical aspects, the term sectarianism is sometimes used to refer to a kind of culture that plagues the Lebanese, who always threaten to relapse into a rally around the religious flag, failing to recognize mutual interests and shared belonging. That particular 'anthropology' won't be reproduced here, but it is clear that sectarianism is a primary reference point (and referent) in people's understanding of who they are, what is possible, and what should be done. Sectarianism is both a political reality – a certain way resources and relations are distributed and organized – and a 'language' – a certain way of classifying and explaining things. My analytical contention for this thesis, then, is that a productive way to understand the differences in the way people perceive, and attempt to enact, their role in the political community is to understand how they relate to sectarianism.

While I do discuss how they engage the 'sectarian' system in its various instantiations, in order to get things done, ultimately I'm most interested in how they make sense of that organizational reality and of how they position themselves towards it. This is a puzzling question for the following reason. On the one hand, sectarianism is both an intractable political reality and the dominant political language of the country. Yet on the other it is *also* widely perceived as broken. Expressions of dissatisfaction about the state of the country and its politics are near universal. Several parties have the abolishment of sectarianism as a 'policy objective', while

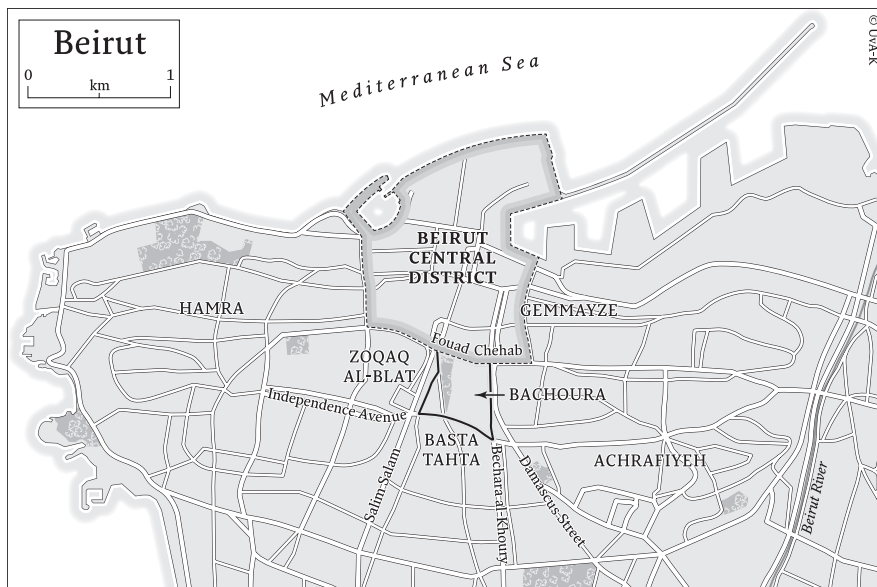
the 1989 'peace treaty' (the so-called Taif Accord) charged the country's political leader with finding a way of accomplishing it. However, there is no real political force behind it and perhaps there never was (with the possible exception of the run-up to and the first years of civil war, when a strong Left alliance clamoured for structural change). Different people have different ideas about why or how it's broken, though. Very roughly, positions vary from a principled and radical denial of all things sectarian and the call for a 'civil' state, to a denunciation of others' abuse of power in the name of sectarian rights or privilege, while stopping short of calling the actual system into question. This tension between the ideological and institutional weight of sectarianism and people's widespread condemnation produces an interesting paradox. Firstly, you would want to know, if it is broken, where exactly do people situate the fundamental issues that Lebanon has to deal with? What are needs or desires they identify that are not being addressed or met by the existing 'system'. But then secondly you want to understand how people can formulate these needs or desires. How do people voice their political grievances, if the dominant categories of political analysis are supplied by 'sectarianism' itself? This goes to the core of what Rancière called the political. In his work (e.g., 2001; 2004) on political contention, the political consists of people bringing in concerns and ways of discerning that were not part of the (social or political) status quo. If we translate that to Lebanon, how are people able to evaluate political goings-on and take a stance on what is happening in sectarian Lebanon, given the hegemony of the sectarian frame? In other words, what political language do they need to develop, and which symbolic resources do they have at their disposal, that would allow them to take critical distance?

In order to start answering these questions we need to go back to the styles of imagination. A crucial element of people's political imagination is the kind of moral community of which they consider themselves a part. Moral communities provide a moral baseline against which people can judge things, and provide a social horizon in relation to which people can situate themselves. Inscription in the moral community occurs via a set of discursive repertoires (i.e., ways of speaking that consist of words and their histories, tropes, conversational rules, etc.). One element of such a repertoire we may call framing devices. The term 'device' perhaps calls forth too voluntaristic or, well, too instrumental an understanding of the workings of the human mind, even though framing devices can certainly be reflexively and purposefully deployed (meta-pragmatically, in linguistic anthropological parlance). Political campaigns are well-known fields for such conscious deployment. Still, such devices allow

people to qualify things and people to be of a certain kind and they usually contain, or are intimately tied to, moral evaluations of these kinds of things and people. That means that they also say something about the relation of the individual deploying the framing device with – or her position on – the thing or person thus framed. Depending on the audience's or interlocutor's familiarity with the framing device, they will be able to understand its referent, its (moral) connotations and consequently intuit where the speaker is coming from and where she wants to go, so to speak. One important device in this case is the name people assign to a moral community, which frames the speaker in a 'we'. Another main device is the 'stance' from which one speaks, which frames the speaker as a particular, socially identifiable kind of speaker. These elements of the repertoire constitute the core of the two overarching styles of thinking about Lebanon and one's part in it that I examine in this thesis. In one such style, people see themselves as part of "civil society" and take up the stance of "the citizen", whereas in the other people consider themselves to be part of "the people" and identify with "the ordinary man". In between the two, there is relatively little familiarity with – and thus understanding of – each other's framing devices. My contention though is that both these frames offer people discursive opportunities to critically reflect on political realities.

The two styles of imagination have a meaningful geography and are in fact tied to my two main fieldwork sites. The first site is actually a diverse set of largely rotating sites, (temporarily) occupied by NGO activities, events organized by more topical and ephemeral collectivities and initiatives by various kinds of "activists". Most protagonists are either in their twenties or thirties, usually come from middle or higher-class backgrounds and almost universally have attended higher education. They belong to all confessional communities, though Shia youth are probably underrepresented (which follows from a related underrepresentation among the higher classes). Their activities are mostly geared towards the creation of a new form and language of public debate, to bringing people from different backgrounds (sectarian communities) together and to develop platforms that would call for greater political transparency or more rigorous equality under the law. The bulk of them are organized in two sections of Beirut, namely Hamra to the west of the city centre, and Gemmayze to the east. Hamra is the site of two prominent Anglophone universities and has the reputation of being the 'intellectual' quarter ever since the 1960s or so. It also enjoys the reputation of being one of the 'few remaining' confessionally diverse neighbourhoods. At the time of my research, though, cafés were rapidly replac-





ing older agents and forms of confessional ‘co-existence’. Gemmayze enjoys no reputation of (residential) confessional diversity, but around 2000 it did become a focal point in the city’s nightlife; and all are equal – are they not – before the disco ball. Additionally, in the margins of Gemmayze’s bars and clubs, there were a few organizations and places that served as hosts for “civil society” activities. For most members of this ‘civil society’, these two neighbourhoods, because of their perceived insulation from sectarian overdetermination (as well as the fact they catered to activities associated primarily with most members’ age bracket) must have been a natural setting for their projects. (See map above.) However, the opposite is also possible, when initiatives would be organized in areas that were clearly the ‘domain’ of one sect, as a proactive intervention (or at least statement) that in itself intends (indexically, Peirce would say) to overcome those divisions in society that people in “civil society” tried to fight.

The second site is more stable: a neighbourhood of some 25,000 people just below the city centre called “Al-Khandaq al-Ghamiq”. It is a mostly working-class neighbourhood, while the entire socio-economic range extends from the near-destitute to the more comfortably middle-class. About 80% of its residents belong to the Shia community, the remaining 20% are Sunni, of whom most are Arabic speaking Kurds. Politically,

the map is a bit more complex. There are two Shia parties: Amal and Hizbullah. Visually, Amal has marked the neighbourhood as its 'territory', with flags, graffiti and slogans dominating most of the streetscape. While many in the neighbourhood are also 'with Amal', the party can make no hegemonic claim to the neighbourhood. Hizbullah enjoys near-universal appreciation and for a long time only Hizbullah ran for local elections in the district, on a joint ticket with the dominant Sunni party, the Future Movement. Yet, even though both Shia parties are institutionally present in the neighbourhood, there is only one small 'island' in the neighbourhood that has been marked visually as 'Hizbullah's'. The Kurds have loose, opportunistic ties to the Future Movement, whereas the latter's ties to the neighbourhood's 'Arab' Sunnis are much more tight. My research in this area is mostly that of street life – daily congregations of colleagues, friends and family over tea, coffee or food – and parallels in that way my research about 'civil society', which also concerns the public dimension of the participants' lives. It is the nature of that publicity that is the object of this research project. As much as possible though, I've tried to find out how that publicity is rooted in relations and practices that extend beyond and behind it.

My argument is that each of these styles of political imagination – each public culture, you might say – constitute different political subjects. Or, to rephrase, political subjects are formed in the contention (freely after Rancière, again) that these styles allow. As people assert their politics, as they critically evaluate political goings-on on the basis of the fundamental needs or issues they posited, political subjectivity emerges. With Ortner (2005) we can say that subjectivity is made up of three dimensions: it is a kind of consciousness (a way of knowing), it is built up around certain affects (that Ortner circumscribes with Raymond Williams' 'structures of feeling') and is tied to practice (embodied action-in-the-world). In respect to the first dimension, Ortner says we need to understand consciousness in two ways – as individuals who are reflexive about their place in the world and as shared ways of knowing (a 'collective' consciousness). In terms of affect, political subjectivity is formed through the cultivation of certain emotions (anger, excitement) and more broadly, certain affective states (like indignation, hope, or acquiescence). Finally, political subjectivity is meaningfully tied to and partially formed in practices that open up or consolidate spaces in the public sphere and its wider polity. These practices can be of the reflexive and pragmatic as well as of the habitus kind.

These are clearly complex matters that deserve holistic approaches. There are two things that at least need explication right from the get-go:

one, how the shared ways of knowing relate to individual reflexivity, and two, how individual reflexivity relates to affect. In one way, subjectivity is a shared or collective way of being, a way that a number of people engage the political field, a way that is tied to a certain sociological figuration. In this thesis, I analyse that kind of political subjectivity largely from a discursive perspective – the way people ‘know’ their political world through the discursive practices that they share. The aforementioned framing devices constitute one such practice I will be looking at. While shared ways of speaking, these specific master framing devices of the citizen and the ordinary man also offer a way of thinking about how they constitute individual subjectivities. What they offer people is a ‘stance’ from which to effectuate their evaluations. One may understand such stances as discursive subject positions. With this qualification, I loosely take inspiration from linguistic anthropological approaches to how (Goffmanian) interactional orders relate to subjectivity. For authors from this tradition, a subject position is an available ‘cultural category’ (Silverstein 2003) of personhood or a social actor, a category that people can align themselves with, for example by using the relevant framing devices. The devices are performative: those deploying the frame inhabit the position. Arguably, part of one’s subjectivity follows from recurrently inhabiting (or aligning with) such positions, as one makes it one’s own. This brings us to affect. In alignment, people rehearse and experience some of the characteristics of the subject position – how it feels to take a certain stand, explore (with others) what dreams may be possible, and determine what one can do. In part then, one can see subjectivity as the sediments of these alignments as they root themselves in a person’s “conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires” (Weedon 2005: 18).<sup>2</sup> This thesis will therefore ask which kind of subjectivity people cultivate as they evaluate their world – which ways of knowing they develop, what their hopes and dreams are and what they think is possible for them and for Lebanon. While the emphasis in this thesis is initially on the discursive dimensions, towards the end of the thesis I shift that emphasis over onto these experiential matters of embodied subjectivity. Throughout, I remain attentive to how people’s notions about Lebanon are tied to the daily practices of finding one’s way, as well as their attempts to actualize them.

2     Whereas a subject position is a *discursive* ‘fact’, subjectivity is one of embodiment. Ortner precisely argues against such a discursive kind of understanding of subjectivity, arguing that part of the essence of what subjectivity is – a complex structure of feeling – is left out of these analyses. That may be a risk, but it’s not a necessary implication.

These questions and the focus on subjectivity more generally allow me to make a contribution to a body of literature that Paley (2002) reviewed and dubbed “the anthropology of democracy”, and in particular a strand that problematizes “qualities of citizenship” (Paley 2002: 479). In this strand, scholars posit that citizenship is not uniformly shared by all citizens but “unevenly enacted” over space and time. Hence we can distinguish between formal citizenship – being a recognized citizen of a nation – and the de facto insertion into the political order – the rights one can actually deduce from such citizenship, and under which conditions. This distinction, which Paley derives from a well-known piece by Holston & Caldeira (1998), is quite similar to other important interventions in the study of citizenship. Isin (2009: 370) distinguishes the ‘subject-position’ of the citizen from the subject (migrant, refugee, state) who enacts the position, but may or may not herself possess the *status* of ‘citizen’. Similarly, Bosniak (2006) has looked at aliens who are *practically* citizens of a political community despite not having any legal recognition of being so. Thus, both Holston & Caldeira, on the one hand, and Isin and Bosniak, on the other, look at what happens when people do not possess or cannot claim the full rights of citizen-hood<sup>3</sup> – and what that implies about the nature of the polity. Both approaches lead to similar questions: what status positions are assigned in any given legal system, how do these positions translate practically in different social and political contexts, what claims to citizen status do people make in relation to that status and position, what citizen ‘practices’ are enacted when the status can’t be realized? In our case, how does Lebanon’s sectarian system distribute rights and duties among its citizens? How does it figure into their imagination of who they are? What are Lebanese able and willing to claim on its basis? In what political relations are such claims embedded?

Such questions lend themselves naturally to a scrutiny in terms of subjectivity. Arguably, it’s at the very core of such questions (subjectivity does matter for democracy, to respond to Wedeen’s [2004: 288] question). Yet, the way it has been discussed in – what may be broadly termed as – postcolonial scholarship has not always been in these terms. Rather, the logic of rule – predominantly conceived as mechanisms of differential access to the state – is central in these works (Partha Chatterjee’s ideas about “political society” stand out as a paradigmatic

3 Please forgive the neologism. I will occasionally use it to emphasize the inhabited or subjective character of being a citizen (citizenness as a *quale* of subjects, as it were), in contrast to ‘citizenship’, which conjures up more standard images of something that people have or exercise.

example). With that focus on political logics, political subjects no longer come across as actual people of flesh and blood: as people who are swayed by the power of words and who are party to the exchange of ideas. In that move to logics, then, scholars (like Chatterjee) sometimes seem to forget the webs of meaning that the children of men suspend themselves in, reducing people's lives instead to the materiality of their circumstances and tactics. By contrast, by taking seriously the terms that people use and the frames with which they align themselves, this thesis offers a vista on those intricate webs of meaning as well as their relevance for our understanding of "what people are up to" – in Geertz' formulation of anthropology's task – as 'citizens'. When that vista opens up, what stands out is that that people's engagements with the political are also deeply moral in nature.

The thesis proceeds with Geertz' task as follows. The book is divided into three sections and each section is divided into two chapters. In the first section I introduce the field. The first chapter serves to provide some necessary historical background and doubles as a review of the literature on Beirut. In the end I bring that literature to bear on the questions of this book. In the literature review, I focus on those works who in some way have addressed the question what the post-war reconstruction has been about. The emphasis is on the physical reconstruction of the city, but naturally physical reconstruction is inextricable from questions about political and social reconstruction (questions such as which state institutions should be (made) competent to regulate the process?; or what of the people who were displaced during the war?). Overwhelmingly, scholars have answered this question with "territoriality": reconstruction would have been about securing and reclaiming territory, for one's constituency or for one's business or political network. My question therefore at the end of that chapter is how does 'territoriality' play out in my field sites and how would it factor into people's political imagination?

I start off that exploration in Khandaq. Chapter 2 is a first ethnographic introduction to the neighbourhood and explores how it has fared in the 'reconstruction era'. The focus is therefore on how the neighbourhood qua urban space has been made and how residents have dealt with the changes. Hence, I inquire into the intervention of political actors in the neighbourhood, I follow a number of real-estate developers who have been locally active over the past decade or so, and I show how residents are attempting to maintain their foothold in a quickly evolving real-estate market. These explorations reveal that while (confessional) territories

are certainly part of the social imaginary, actual competition over territory is not as central a dynamic as the cases treated in the literature about Beirut. Real-estate is a rather banal affair to most in Khandaq. From there I extend the discussion into an engagement with Marxist urban sociological literature. Given that banality of the production of space, the conception of urban politics that some of its main protagonists espouse is not very helpful. Counter to how Marxist sociologists and geographers have conceived it, and in contrast to the dominant trope of Beirut scholarship, the production of space or territory – while both subject to popular scrutiny and worry – does not appear form be a dominant frame through which people from Khandaq see themselves as part of the body politic. The question then arises, where *do* they situate themselves?

That question takes us into the second section, which stays in Khandaq, also considers the presence of the political party, as well as of the local state, but takes out the analytical prism of space and territory. I take two steps to answer the question above, where the first chapter sets up the second. Chapter 3 takes a second historical look at the neighbourhood, now focusing on ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ institutions of governance in the neighbourhood. In particular I look at elected ‘street level bureaucrats’ called *mukhtars*; at local strongmen; and at political leadership at the national level. Two questions guide the analysis: how is the power or authority of ‘the state’ and that of political leaders mediated through these local figures of the mukhtar and the strongman; and how does the balance of power between the different players evolve over time? Judging by the comments of the mukhtars and strongmen, that question of authority – or sovereignty – is a significant one.

It is in Chapter 4 that I examine that question of sovereignty from the residents’ perspective. It is actually a question that preoccupies people most consistently in their public talks. The kind of world that residents publically imagine themselves to be a part of, is the sectarian community that exists within the intersecting sovereignties of the state and the political party. My tack at understanding how they see these ‘entities’ is by positing that people’s experiences with the mukhtar and the strongmen provide occasions for them to elaborate their ideas about the state and the political party, respectively. These ideas are highly ambivalent. I show that such ambivalence draws on the discursive fodder that the notion of being but ordinary men provides: that notion is the basis for critical stances towards both entities. While residents are self-evidently part of the sectarian world, they are therefore not wholly subsumed by it. Meanwhile, the intersecting sovereignties themselves



also continually provide new material for shifting stances. The chapter ends by comparing the ways people navigate that local political field with recent theory about the postcolonial state that takes fractured or uneven sovereignty as its starting point, and which draws inspiration from Deleuze & Guattari's 'revolutionary' theories of statecraft to think about how people in the margins 'slip' through the institutional 'cracks'.

While I am able to close the second section with a first answer to my questions about political imagination, it is still only based on my first field site. In the last section we move into the second 'case study' in order to enrich our understanding of the Lebanese political universe. In particular it will throw in relief the kinds of ideas that people have about citizenship. The differences between the two 'worlds' in turn allow me to take on a second but related strand of postcolonial theory, which has taken a differentiation between two forms of citizenship - one privileged and empowered, the other disinherited and marginal - as the basis for its understanding of the nature of postcolonial societies and politics. The section proceeds in the same manner as the previous two sections. The first of the two chapters provides the necessary empirical baseline, whereas the second devotes the greater share of its prodigious verbiage to a discussion of theory. Chapter 5, then, introduces the world of Beirut civil society. It shows what 'being part' of civil society means to people and the work that goes into being a 'citizen'. The main, overarching difference with the style of imagination in Khandaq is the relation to the sectarian world. Whereas being part of it was largely self-evident to people in Khandaq, in 'civil society', people take great pains of creating an alternative, neutral space, outside of the sectarian world.

Chapter 6 takes that difference and juxtaposes it to theories that have taken just such a difference as the basis for their thinking about (post-colonial) citizenship. It then addresses and ethnographically explicates a dual problem that emerges from that juxtaposition: the civil kind of citizenship can't live up to its ideal type (get it?), whereas the popular kind amounts to much more than the strategic logic of making-do to which it denizens are often reduced. In order to resolve these two problems I return to an explicit attention to political subjectivity. If one considers people's shared ways of knowing, their affects and practices, as tied to certain settings, one avoids risks of both hypostatizing and reducing people (in)to logical categories. It will also result in a 'thicker' understanding of what people are up as citizens, and what that means to them.

Following the conclusion, and an afterword in which I show a few glimpses the impact of the 'Arab Spring' (which took place after my main fieldwork period) on the understanding of the ideals and goals for many people in 'civil society', you will find an appendix in which I provide qualifications of my findings based on the research choices I have made.

## Chapter 1

# Territorialization and the sectarian city

This chapter accomplishes two goals. It provides an introduction to Beirut, where the action of this thesis takes place, and it develops an initial review of how others have written about this place. It concludes that review by asking in how far these works help us understand what people in Beirut (think they) are up to, as members of their (imagined) political community.

Firstly, it is necessary to qualify the scope of this research. While 'Beirut' can in many ways stand in for 'Lebanon', in other, equally significant ways, it cannot. In a few broad strokes, Beirut stands out in Lebanon for the sheer diversity of the city: a particular mix of segregation and intermingling of confessional, socio-economic, ethnic and national differences. It does so because of the incredible concentration of capital: it is the premier site for investment of all sorts in Lebanon, even as investment is unequally distributed across the city itself. Another particularity can be tied to the close imbrication of local (district) and national politics, which has historically meant that constituencies are quite closely imbricated with national political developments. Given these specificities, the tale I tell in this thesis is a Beiruti one. That doesn't mean that "Lebanon", as an imagined horizon doesn't often come up in people's interactions. However, how people imagine Lebanon to be is certainly tied to their place in this city. The reader therefore requires some historical background as to how this city has been formed. This chapter aspires to provide such a background, by presenting a thematically focused discussion of roughly half a century of Beiruti history. It ventures out into national and geopolitical developments whenever necessary to understand that history.

Secondly and equally importantly, the chapter doubles as a review of the literature on Beirut. This review is far from exhaustive, and more scholarly works will make their appearance as the materials of the suc-

cessive chapters require it. In this chapter, though, I suss out the structuring themes of a loosely urban sociological literature, one that surveys the effects of the civil war on city life, on the one hand, and how the city gets built and is governed, on the other. The dominant trope and concern of works in these two domains is that of ‘territorialization’ and fit largely in those ‘paradigms’ in urban studies that have focused on ‘divided’, ‘wounded’ or ‘contested’ cities (Low 1999; Susser & Schneider 2003; cf. Low 1996). Roughly, the idea is – sometimes as an explicit argument (Khalaf 1993, Beyhum 1992), sometimes as a starting point (Genberg 2003, Bou Akar 2012) – that the Lebanese wars between 1975 and 1990 saw increasing, deepening involvement of political actors (and their military counterparts) in urban space, which served to parcel up the city, both on the ground and in people’s imagination. If so, that would be immediately relevant for our questions: if military and political actors intervened in spaces of everyday life, and if people understood themselves primarily as taking part in spatially relatively closed communities, then obviously that would shape how people perceive and engage with the political field. Thus I close this chapter by asking more pointedly how far territoriality can take us in understanding people’s social imaginaries and the practices that instantiate these imaginaries.

**Preamble: a note on words** The 50-odd years of Beirut’s most recent history that I present here is really an overview of factors leading up to what is usually called the ‘civil war’, of the war itself, and of its aftermath. I’m somewhat loathe to foreground the war in this way, as it already tends to become an explain-all factor in Lebanese history and society (a shortcut both scholars of Lebanon and Lebanese themselves are at times tempted by). At the same time, it would be equally unwise to understate its impact and it does provide a relatively accessible framework with which to wade through the intricacies of recent Lebanese history. I will therefore proceed with this framework, the objections notwithstanding. To offset these risks somewhat, allow me to preface it with the following caveats.

The focus on the ‘civil war’ poses two problems: one terminological, the other more properly historiographic. The terminological problem is threefold. Firstly, the inclusion of the term ‘civil’ implies that it was a war ‘internal’ to the nation. Nothing could be further from the truth, as in many ways it was a proxy war by regional and global powers<sup>4</sup>. (And

4 Davie summarized the confusion in 1983 thus:

Il n’y a aucune définition unanimement acceptée de la guerre au Liban et surtout à Beyrouth. A ceux qui la définissent comme « guerre-civile » entre Libanais,

in fact, most “civil wars” aren’t ‘internal’ anyway, see Cramer 2006: 61ff.) At the very least, the influx of materials and capital allowed it to last as long and to reach the scale it did. This qualification of course does not imply that one should disregard the fact that various Lebanese factions were pitted against each other, as for example Ghassan Tuéni’s famous qualification of “the war of others on our territory” seems to encourage (as attractive it might be for those living on said territory)<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, the term ‘civil’ most likely comes with the supposition that the war was carried out by civilians – one step along the descent into a Hobbesian state of nature. This assumption is also quickly invalidated by empirical reality – in fact, a tiny proportion of the Lebanese population was in some structural way active participant in the conflict (cf. Nasr 1990: 4). Thirdly, then, for some the term ‘war’ may imply one ceaseless battle, stretching out over the 15 years of its duration. In point of fact, the period is a container for a series of armed conflicts (or ‘wars’), carried out at different times, in different places and by different actors with stints of relative peace in between.

The historiographic problem of placing the war front and centre in an overview of Lebanese history is that it becomes easy to assume that it was somehow a uniquely defining moment, a break from the preceding period and an indubitable and indelible stamp on the post-bellum. Such a view belies a number of continuities. The analytical problem runs in two directions. First, as many (intellectual) Lebanese will contend, it belies the continuities from the war period into the post-war period. One will often be able to hear the claim that ‘the war has never ended’. That claim, while more polemical than analytical, is based on a few observations: issues at stake during the war have not been settled; those same issues have been the basis of constant tension and they seem to have sparked recurring violent conflicts over the past 15 years; and that many of the protagonists of the war are still protagonists of today’s political scene (there’s a pattern here). Second, there are continuities running in the opposite direction, from before the war, extending throughout and beyond it. Contemporary Lebanon was in fact not made there and then – militias built on paradigms of rule developed in the decades previously, the post-war compro-

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s’opposent ceux qui la classent « guerre libano-palestinienne ». A ceux qui parlent de guerre de religion, chrétiens contre musulmans, s’opposent ceux qui rétorquent guerre de « libération », menée contre les étrangers, les Arabes, les isolationnistes, les sioniste, les gauchistes, les athées et les fascistes. [Puis il] y a ceux qui disent que c’est une guerre entre les « riches » et les « pauvres » du pays.” (1983: 18)

5 And in fact, Leenders (2004a) argues that we should not lose sight of the fact that the Lebanese state remained a main (political and moral) stake in the conflict.

mise changed nothing substantially in the political system, and people have continued living ordinary lives, by and large with depoliticized notions of who the other is, revved up about his dangers only in times of heightened stakes.

These caveats should be kept in mind, as I move on to explain the 'build-up' to the war, its impact on Beirut life, and its legacies in the post-war period.

**Antecedents to war** This section is built up around three segments. Each segment presents a different empirical emphasis: the first discusses demographic changes in Beirut, the second shifts in Lebanese the political landscape, and the third broader, geopolitical developments. All these three tie into each other. The following section then presents a discussion of the actual war period and more specifically of attempts by the various armed factions to claim and rule its spaces. Together these two sections serve as a short empirical introduction that will help the reader understand and place the literature that I then go on to discuss and which has tried to develop a narrative of what these various historical developments have culminated in during the war.

**Rural-urban migration** We start off with demographic changes. This is mostly a story of urbanization and the dislocations it tends to bring in its wake. On the one hand, you have the capitalization and mechanization of agriculture. These developments produced a grand-scale rural exodus, primarily of Maronite and Shia peasants who moved to the cities, especially Beirut, in search of other employ. The cities were only partially able to absorb this new influx of labour force. The Maronites<sup>6</sup>, slightly higher educated, generally found semi-skilled jobs, while the majority of Shia were inserted into the unskilled sector. Here, they entered into competition with Syrian migrant workers as well as many Palestinians from the camps, who were legally barred from a number of more highly skilled professions.

At least two consequences of this increased competition over scarce (urban) jobs are directly relevant here. One is the development of an anti-foreigner discourse, in which Syrian migrant workers as well as the

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6 Cheat sheet for those unfamiliar with Lebanese denominations: Maronites constitute largest Christian confessional community in Lebanon. The Maronite church is largely Catholic in rite and doctrine, under independent leadership but tied to Rome. The community's leadership was the most fervent advocate of the Lebanese nation in the lead-up to independence, and was actually instrumental in bringing the very country into being during the French Mandate.

Palestinians were identified as the exemplars of this category of undesirables (Traboulsi 2007: 147f.). This discourse would reverberate with discourses about national sovereignty, especially as regards the Palestinian resistance (see below). The second pertains to the social and political position of the rural migrants, who came to occupy a marginal position in the system of political representation, which was intimately tied to the provision of social services. (Hanf 1993; Johnson 1986, 2001) Politicians accorded help – financial aid, jobs, and mediation with state authorities – on the basis of loyalty in the ballot box. A particularity of the Lebanese electoral system is that place of residence and the location of one's voting booth are not automatically linked, and synchronizing these after a move can in fact be quite difficult (I discuss this particularity in more detail in Chapter 3). The migrants – living in Beirut but still registered in their ancestral villages – thus became relatively marginal to the political representatives in their voting districts (Hillenkamp 2005: 220; Hanf 1993: 85). With their lives now rooted elsewhere, they were no longer in as great a need of services back home, provided by the rural notable families, nor were these families capable of providing services in the city (where they were less influential), and some may not have relied on services previously anyway, given that, especially among the Shia, the relations to the political families who 'represented' them were near feudal (at least, "feudalism" was an accusation levelled at the political bosses from the old families by both the Lebanese left and right).

In sum, economic and demographic changes produced a number of strains on the system that organized the polity. Urban desolation led to challenges and frustrations that the patron-client relations only had insufficient answers to. This is where new social movements and political parties stepped in. The social insecurity that seemed unmanageable resulted in a tense environment that (non-establishment) political actors capitalized on to mobilize for, or legitimate, more radical interventions.

**From 'notable politics' to the rise of new social movements and parties** Urbanization and capitalization of the economy fuelled political developments already under way. The political system in Lebanon had been dominated by various notable families, tied to a particular district, and servicing in tit-for-tat fashion, though to regionally varying degrees, the population of that district. Other factions or actors, such as intellectuals or lesser notable families, participated in politics, local or national, through their connections to the more powerful families. The anti-colonial struggle had yielded several movements, most of them pan-Arab in identity or ideology, but none had gained a significant foothold in either

society or the political system. This started changing in the 1960s. Pan-Arabism with Nasser & Co. had provided new élan and funding for social movements and parties tied to their cause. The institutionalization of the resistance against Israel also provided some infrastructural backbone for various movements, particularly on the (communist and socialist) 'Left'. On the right as well though, particularly the Christian right, tectonic shifts were becoming visible. The prime example of such a shift was the growth of the 'Phalangist' party. It was founded as a nationalist, socialist in the sense of anti-communist, and aspirationally fascist movement in the 1930s, in the midst of ideological battles for and over Lebanese independence. It only became a substantial political force as it gained in popular affiliation in the 1960s and 70s with various actions and protests through its militia wing, as well as shifting alliances with other movements or political notables. These movements tapped into the 'unsettlement' of social, economic and political practices, and cumulatively altered the political calculus in the country (cf. e.g. Hanf 1993: 85). There are three main factors that transformed the 'calculus'. Firstly, the institutionalization of militias (also as employer) and the use of organized violence as a structural (rather than occasional) modality of political organization. Secondly, the incorporation of the lost urban tribes into social movements and 'ideological' parties<sup>7</sup>, such as the Nasserites (especially Sunnis), Communists (especially Shia) or the Phalangists (especially Maronites). The result was not necessarily the marginalization of political notables, though that could certainly be the case (especially the Shia notables fared ill); savvy notables knew how to strike strategic alliances, but as Johnson suggests (1986: 210; cf. Traboulsi 2007: 208f.), they were mostly just trying to regain a grip on the situation. The social movements and political parties would be the main protagonists of the war. It would be impossible to understand this particular development without the increasing importance of geopolitical considerations and alliances though, which could make and break ideas and forces. I discuss these in the final segment of this section.

**Impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict** One cannot understand the 'civil war' without the impact of the foundation of the state of Israel. It was the common denominator in the foreign policies of all countries in the

7 The admittedly curious phrase is meant to identify parties to which some kind of ideological program is more central, and in which the formation of a political cadre is more important. These characteristics differentiates them from the parties that serve as more as a convenient platform for political notables. The line is a blurry one, though.



region, and even if some by 1974 had signed peace agreements, others had not. Most notably, Syria had not. That entailed serious consequences for neighbouring Lebanon. But let's take a few steps back. Particularly in the South of Lebanon, Palestinian militias<sup>8</sup> had built up their forces and scaled up their resistance, first after the 1967 Six-Day War and then especially after the PLO's expulsion from Jordan – their former base of operations – in 1970. This caused numerous tensions – with the Lebanese population of the south who bore the brunt of Israeli retaliations and with the right wing of the Christian political forces who saw the rise in power of the Palestinian militias with wary eyes. Many Christians feared a de-facto takeover of Lebanon by the Palestinian movement (a fear, ultimately, of losing autonomy and protection for the Christian communities). A pacification of the issues seemingly had been reached with the so-called Cairo Agreement of 1969, which gave the Palestinian movement sovereignty within the established Palestinian 'camps', but proscribed their actions outside of that. (These 'camps' were largely legal fictions. Though some were indeed somewhat delimited spaces, with marked borders and checkpoints, most had already fused more or less seamlessly with the surrounding [urban] environment.) However, the agreement soon proved impossible to enforce. The Phalange party then decided to take the 'defence' of the state into its own hands. They found political and material backing in the rising influence of Saudi-Arabia's more conservative approach to the Palestinian Question – after the Nasserite defeat in 1967. This "Christian-Palestinian" conflict was the start of the war. Soon the various other parties took position in this conflict. The 'left' – and largely Muslim – movements and parties took the side of the Palestinians – central as pan-Arabism was to the Arab Left – and united into the 'National Movement'. The religious overcoding of this political conflict – the opposition of forces dominated by 'Muslims' against 'Christian' parties – allowed older tension and distrust to come to the surface. Quite quickly the conflict turned sectarian in nature, most markedly through the "ID-killings", for which people were kidnapped and murdered on the basis of the confessional belonging marked on their identity cards, and through massacres and expulsions in vulnerable minority sectors. The war, as it developed throughout its various phases, did so, therefore, along three main points of contention: the resistance against Israel and

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8     Palestinians first fled to Lebanon with the 1948 foundation of the state of Israel. While they were active in the resistance, full militarization did not occur until the 1960s, especially after 1967 and 1970. The PLO was certainly the dominant faction, but many Arab nations had their own (sizeable) pro-Palestinian militias operating in Lebanon.

the 'Palestinian question'; the assertion of the political parties against the primacy of the old notable political elite; and questions of confessional equality and protection.

**Wartime in Beirut: territorial reshufflings** The various stakes as well as the relatively large diversity of actors created a somewhat chaotic dynamic that is difficult to capture in a modest number of lines. Even if the details in the following overview defy the reader's focus, what should at least become clear is that the city becomes the stake itself for political and military competition. Rounds of fighting occur on the basis of attempts to secure and control sectors of the city, though always with the aim of accomplishing other (political) goals.

The clash between the Phalangists (and partners) and the Palestinians (and their leftist allies) made for the first phase of the war, which lasted for about two years. It came to an end through Syrian intervention, which put a halt to Christian advancements. Syria wanted to preserve the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, as it still thought they might serve well as proxy warriors in Syria's own relations with Israel. This phase of the war saw the division of the city into a largely 'Muslim' western and a largely 'Christian' eastern sector, where the conservative Christian militias managed to consolidate themselves into a single front and the Palestinian-Left forces divided the front line into respective domains. This latter division would bode ill for 'West'-Beirut. The establishment of this bifurcating military geography meanwhile coincided with demographic reshufflings: Christians 'moving' to the east, and Muslims (especially many of the Shia rural migrants) moving to the west.

A somewhat quiet phase followed that lasted until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Plans for reconstruction were being drawn, but in hindsight still the period is characterized by the entrenchment of the factional interests and by increased international interventions, whether directly by the presence of their forces (beyond Syria and Israel, the U.S., France, the U.N. and others) or indirectly through the material and financial support of militias (such as Iraq, Libya, Saudi-Arabia and the U.S.S.R.). As for the Lebanese parties, the National Movement began falling apart, with things turning sour particularly between the Palestinians and the Shia, especially in the south, where Palestinian activities provoked Israeli retaliations that made life unbearable. Clashes in the south, meanwhile, also produced substantial migration of Shia to Beirut, most of whom settled to the south of (West) Beirut, where rural migrants had already preceded them, thus forming the 'southern suburbs' (that we will hear more of further along). The break-up of the Palestinian-Shia alliance as well as the

cooperation between various leftist parties would set up the repeated clashes for control over various sectors of west Beirut, in the aftermath of 1982 Israeli invasion.

In 1982, Israel rolled out a full-scale operation in order to crush the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon for good. It was successful, marching all the way up to Beirut, where a safe departure for the Palestinian leadership was then negotiated. With the Palestinian forces now diminished and decapitated, when the Israelis retreated to the zone in southern Lebanon that they already controlled, they left a vacuum (i.e., a collection of weak military groups) in West-Beirut<sup>9</sup> that Syria subsequently filled. The invasion and subsequent Syrian take-over also entailed the virtual destruction of the Leftist forces. Among other things, their demise signified the definitive rise of *confessional* alternatives to notable politics in the Shia community, in the form of the militias Amal and Hizbullah.

These rearrangements heralded the last phase of the war. This phase is characterized by repeated rounds of fighting, in various constellations, between the former allies and made tight spatial control and invasive security apparatuses a fact of life in West-Beirut. One of the most powerful militias to emerge from this phase is Amal, the first Shia militia, who now sought the protection and support of Syria. The culmination of their rise is the 'take-over' of West Beirut, which they accomplished with the help of the main Druze militia, the PSP, the other strong force on the 'Muslim side' to emerge out of 1982. Together they also defeated and dissipated the only Sunni fighting force, the Murabitun. (Sunnis were subsequently left in a political near-vacuum, only to be filled after the war.) Amal's dominance would wind up wreaking havoc on greater West Beirut. Its troops would harass remaining Christian communities out of West-Beirut. In 1984 they laid a series of (bloody) sieges on the Palestinian camps in order to prevent Palestinian militias from returning and regrouping (the sieges lasted until the First Intifada of 1989, at which point it became symbolically untenable to continue this already exhausting conflict). Later they would fight their former Druze allies for control over West Beirut, with block-to-block fighting. In 1988 it engaged in yet new rounds of war with their new rival, Hizbullah, for control of the Shia areas. Hizbullah was basically a split-off from Amal, around a number of more radical members who did not believe in negotiating for Shia interests with the Lebanese state and government. In the fighting between these two, Amal lost control over many of the Shia centres in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Once these parties

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9 East Beirut was left unscathed, as the Israeli forces had come at the invitation of Christian leadership.

had exhausted themselves, Syria moved in once more in 1989, occupied West-Beirut, and established order.

There are two developments that stand out in this last phase. Firstly, it saw relatively long monopolies of the PSP and Amal over assigned territories in West-Beirut, even if both were broken by the end of the war. Secondly, it brought a significant change of military rule in the southern suburbs, with Hizbullah's successful uprising against Amal. One area in Beirut was never successfully claimed in its entirety by any party – the Downtown area. The status quo of each of these three areas by the end of the war set up differential trajectories for post-war reconstruction and political consolidation. More of that after the next section.

The war ended largely on Syrian terms. It co-supervised negotiation talks in the Saudi resort Ta'if, in 1989. After those talks, it managed to beat down a Christian insurrection against its army and its peace plan by general Michel Aoun in 1990. The Ta'if agreements were implemented and have since formed the basis for a largely demilitarized political order in Lebanon, under official Syrian 'tutelage' until 2005.

**Effects of war on the physical, social and political landscape of Beirut** In the following section I discuss how these historical developments have been studied and framed. Before doing so, however, it may be helpful to synthesize some of the general trends that the exchanges described above have culminated in.

One major urban outcome of the war was the reversal of the place and function of Beirut's city centre. The city centre covered the area of the old, mediaeval, *intra-muros* Beirut. As economic and population growth pushed people out beyond of the mural confines, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the old city increasingly took on the character of a commercial centre. While some of the financial services sector that took flight in the 1950s and 1960s found a home in the more modern Hamra area, the centre hosted most of the major banks, the *sūq* marketplaces, and major public transport hubs, in addition to housing the national government. In many ways, therefore, the old city was indeed the city's centre. The war changed that. Some of the most intense fighting of the early period took place in the centre. While the victory officially went to the allied leftist forces of the National Movement, a good part of the centre was never claimed and settled, turning instead into a dangerous no-man's land, under sniper surveillance and subject to at times heavy shelling. One effect was the decentralization of the city, with the disappearance of a central transport relay point and the dispersal of economic and commercial functions across the city (see Davie 1993; for post-war developments of the pluricentral city,

see Davie 2007). That no one had effectively incorporated the area into a sphere of influence, aside from some settlement of Shia refugees on its western edges, resulted in a second effect. It made the area the likely *symbolic* centre of attention after the war (together with the fact it was one of the most heavily damaged areas in the city), when people started thinking about and negotiating over reconstruction.

In the previous section, I already indicated the religious homogenization that occurred during the war. The most saliently visible and paradigmatic manifestation of that homogenization was the “Green Line” (usually called “the demarcation line” in Arabic) – a thoroughfare separating what became West and East Beirut respectively. It started out as merely a front line between the Christian forces and the National Movement, a front that was historically conditioned (though certainly not determined) by confessional patterns of settlement (the rightist Christian forces set up their front on the outer edges of where they could still rely on a strong territorial base). Soon, however, it became an organizing principle of political and military action. While previously confessional residential patterning was clearly visible, it was far from uniform. Older upper-class confessional diversity existed in neighbourhoods like Zoqaq al-Blat (which will return in Chapter 5 and 6) and Hamra, and more working class diversity around the old centre, and along what would turn out to be the Green Line. More recent sectors of confessional diversity were formed by the rural migrants coming to the city in the 1960s and early ‘70s. (Cf. Hanf 1993: 200f.; for a longer overview of settlement in modern Beirut, see Davie 1991.) The symbolic reality of the Green Line however imposed itself as several moments of extermination, expulsion and flight caused people to regroup on either side of the boundary. Thus, the Syriac Catholic population of Khandaq al-Ghamiq fled due east quite quickly after the beginning of the Two Year War<sup>10</sup>, making room for Shia refugees from the eastern suburbs. The Green Line is paradigmatic because it came to inform how many Lebanese think about how (other) Lebanese have changed: their greater adherence to communal life and the in- or prohibition of crossing communal ‘borders’.

The Green Line, however, was not the only border erected in Beirut. As described in the previous section, in West-Beirut, armed factions fought each other for control over the sector. The united ‘Lebanese Forces’ on the

10 Incidents like the following will have urgently precipitated their flight: “One of the earliest atrocities occurred at the end of May 1975 when a Shi’a Muslim gang called the Knights of Ali (*fityan `ali*) set up a roadblock outside the Bashoura cemetery [near Khandaq al-Ghamiq] and abducted and killed around fifty Christians. The bodies were left among the graves, ‘their penises neatly severed and stuffed in their mouths’” (Johnson, citing Randal, 2001: 10f.).

eastern side of the dividing line had set the tone here. With the consolidation of their dominance, they were able to “[take] over the fifth basin of Beirut port, [organize] a tax system on individuals and enterprises and [administer] the state’s public services”, which resulted in the duplication of the state’s most important administrative sectors in East Beirut (Traboulsi 2007: 210). Traboulsi argues that the Lebanese Forces thus served as a model for what Western militias sought to achieve. There are a number of reasons for this, the one not always clearly distinguishable from the other. One reason is economic in nature: ‘taxes’ and monopolization of economic resources (such as ports) helped sustain the war effort (and for certain high-placed individuals to make a decent profit out of it). Another is more ideological: the services that they are able to perform serve as a symbolic replacement for a state that is depicted as having crumbled or fallen into ‘enemy hands’ (in so far as the political process continued, it was indeed dominated by the Christian parties).

Yet these services were of still greater import. They served two political objectives. One is to establish ties to the constituency and maintain popular support. The second is to use these ties as bargaining power at the recurring rounds at the “table of national dialogue”. Perhaps the most crucial service for both objectives is housing. The militias were instrumental in securing housing for refugee populations (cf. Yahya 2000: 136f.), whether by organizing squats of abandoned buildings, taking over entire areas (such as the beach resorts in Jnah, to the south of Beirut), or even (at times) through the co-ordination the construction of new buildings (most of urban growth during the war was through private initiative though [for a case-study see Fawaz 2008]). Protecting these residential gains (and concomitantly, presence on the ground) was vital for the militias, and clashes over the presence of refugees in various parts of the city were recurrent. To illustrate just how vital, the momentous and still traumatic break-up of the Lebanese army into a Christian and Muslim (Shia) part in 1984, occurred when a general sympathetic to the conservative Christian leadership decided to organize a clean-up operation of Shia refugee squatters in the southern suburbs. Amal, which had until then always held up the primacy of the state and the sanctity of its army, in order to prevent the action, decided to call on Shia soldiers to desist from armed action against their “brothers”. The army subsequently split.

In many ways then, the militias became representatives of constituencies, turning more into political parties. That initiates a third dimension of the territorial dynamics of militia rule in Beirut. While the first was arguably more strategic in nature – capturing and controlling certain sites as part of a larger political stand-off (whether as bargaining chip or as measure

to exert pressure), the second was already more concerned with creating territories in a more political sense – by creating a degree of homogeneity within them. This third representative function then follows suit, in which rule and representation occur on the basis of spatial contiguity and delimitation. This last dimension propelled the militias into the everyday life and governance of the neighbourhoods they controlled. Militia members, for example, began acting as ‘elders’ in the neighbourhood – acting in their capacity of representatives of more and less influential forces in the country (depending on the geopolitical position of the mother-militia) and as individuals with the means to violence. That is, they entered into negotiations with religious institutions, they mediated instances of conflict and regulated retribution and intervened in (private) social relations. In doing so, they also impacted other relations of mediation, as former political notables had to retreat and secondary social powers were able to ascend, such as locals who are able to play role of intermediaries between militias and neighbourhood residents, when militia members overstepped their mark (Beyhum 1991: e.g. 588ff.). In short, they began establishing themselves as obligatory passage-points, or political blocs.

### **Beiruti sociology: ‘territorialization’ and the paradigmatic divided city**

How have scholars of Lebanon interpreted these developments? One can make a rough distinction between works published prior to 1990 and those in the decade or so immediately following. The distinguishing line is the announcement of the reconstruction projects for Beirut. I go into these projects in more detail below; for now it suffices to say that ‘reconstruction’ quite quickly became about reunification – a project to make a nation split apart come together again. That strongly informed the lens with which many (Lebanese) scholars reviewed the legacy that the war had bequeathed on Beirut. Previous to the preoccupation with reconstruction, scholars showed the dynamics of the militia governance in the different neighbourhoods (Beyhum 1991; Nasr 1990), the changed geography of urban functions (Davie 1993), changing intra-confessional struggles over power and religious identity under these new ‘ecological’ conditions (Chbarou & Charara 1985) or the relations between confessional belonging, demographics and economic position (e.g. by Nasr and collaborators, cited in Hanf 1993: 105). While there are obvious family resemblances among the studies undertaken and the themes covered, most of these reports are still quite tentative and exploratory. It is only in relation to a new issue – reconstruction – that a cohering narrative starts to emerge.

That narrative is based on the notion of territoriality and a related preoccupation with identity. That notion of territoriality coalesces around

the debates that take place after the official plans are announced for the reconstruction of the old city centre, quite quickly dubbed “Downtown” (a term that indicates the direction the planners were thinking of). In reaction to those plans, and the fear they would lead to a “ghetto of prosperity”, quite soon the consensus developed that ‘Downtown Beirut’ should – “once again” – be the ‘centre’ of town, i.e., that it should bring together – unite – people from all the neighbourhoods and from all “walks of life”. This consensus dialogically emerged out of re-readings of what the war had done to the city and to its denizens (and Lebanese citizens, by extrapolation<sup>11</sup>).

The shift may be illustrated by a text written by Beyhum in 1992, in which he provides an overview of the three official reconstruction proposals for the city centre since 1977. Previously, Beyhum had already developed the notion of the ‘territorial system’ in his doctoral thesis published a years earlier (1991: 507ff.). At the same time though, the thesis explores a wide, even unwieldy, range of effects of the war on the city<sup>12</sup>, especially in micro-political situations. These researches subsequently converge in the following overview, in the 1992 text, in which he responds to the first reconstruction plans:

The sociological pattern integrating Beirut’s public spaces at the [old] center was seriously undermined by the rise of single-community ghettos in the suburbs. The city was divided into several unconnected islands, and neutral spaces were either annexed to these islands or destroyed. Local public bodies, too, were either attached to these territories, dismantled and deprived of their resources, or divided, thus limiting their efficiency. The population was increasingly marginalized by the war, isolated in its domestic spaces, and was an economic crisis lasting longer than the era of the militias; although the latter disappeared, the economic and social legacy they left behind remained. (Beyhum 1992)

This overview also serves to summarize the consensus in the intellectual commentaries of the time. It comprises two processes generally identi-

11 As mentioned, Beirut is often taken as *pars pro toto* for Lebanon, since a third to half of Lebanon lives there (Davie 1993; Hanf 1993: 199) and the city hosts all of the confessions, the basic elements in any national imagination.

12 Though the ‘reduction of public life’, as he calls it, was already a recurrent theme in that thesis. Such reduction he argued, was both the result of security measures (‘territoriality’ in Sarkis’ language below) as of unpredictable occurrence of violence that had people retreating into more knowable spaces.



fied: a 'political' process, in which (military, sectarian) forces control urban spaces and constrain movement within and between them, and a subsequent 'cognitive' process, in which people start to adapt mentally and socially to these newly constituted spaces, 'withdrawing' into their communities.

Beyhum is the editor of an important edited volume (published originally in Arabic, translated into French) about the 1991 reconstruction proposal called *The Lost Opportunity*. That book was important in diffusing this dual narrative of the war. A different, trend-setting volume (in English this time) under Khalaf and Khoury's editorship (1993) may serve to further illustrate that perspective. One of the contributors, Sarkis, argues that political logics in Lebanon have changed during the war: political actors started thinking politics in spatial terms, creating "territories" by marking them and defending their boundaries. (His ensuing suggestion for reconstruction is that instead of retreating onto neutral ground – the old centre – the state should break each of these territories by marking its own presence on each of them, thus creating 'one national territory'). Here, Sarkis develops the theme of this political kind sequestration. In it, the notion of territoriality ("the practice through which the social and the physical [the built environment] interact in a power relationship" [1993: 104, quoting Sack]) takes centre stage.

The graver consequence of that first ('political') process is that it becomes lodged in people's functional daily geographies and, subsequently, in their minds (the second, cognitive process). People develop a new spatial consciousness and "ideology" as Davie (1993) puts it, even if Davie himself remains cautious in extrapolating from a navigational consciousness to the existence of a full-blown folk sociology of urban difference. Khalaf & Khoury (1993b) are less cautious. They identify two challenges for urban planners: the consolidation of "separate, exclusive, self-contained entities" and a society in which the

most elementary ties which normally cement [it] together – ties of trust, loyalty, confidence, compassion, decency – have been, in many respects, grievously eroded. [...] More compelling and problematic [than reconstructing a state] is the need to restructure basic loyalties (1993: xvf.).

Yahya, later in the volume, explicates how the first challenge has led to the second. The "beleaguered inhabitants" of Beirut, she explains, have "developed strategies that enabled their survival in those times of crisis", but which may "disable their re-entry into a civil and orderly society. Their

perception of the environment was radically altered as the city turned into an “arena of conflict” ceasing to be everyone’s domain” (1993: 129).

The notion of territoriality (in whichever guise) has remained a structuring principle, or at least an underlying assumption, in much of the literature in the 1990s and 2000s. In order to understand that literature though, we need to first return to our historiography and see how Beirut has fared in the post-bellum. The following section picks up the thread with the official reconstruction project.

**Beirut in the Era of Reconstruction** During previous lulls in the fighting, two reconstruction projects had already been studied and proposed. Beyhum (1992) spells out the significant features of these plans. They include most notably the extension of geographical inclusiveness of the project, in how far social diversity should be a factor of consideration, the choice between redevelopment and reconstruction, and whether the locus of agency should be private or public. The project proposals that were developed during the war<sup>13</sup> varied in all these respects: whether they studied only the city centre or the entire metropolitan region, as it sprawled during the war; whether they considered the connection between the centre and the surrounding city; how they balanced the regulatory or executive role of the state, on the one hand, and private initiatives, on the other; and in how far the city should be the facilitator and expression of the integration of people from diverse backgrounds (whether that be social class or confession).

These considerations were still up for discussion in 1990. In rough outline, the plan that was ultimately ratified, reflected the following choices. In terms of the geographical inclusiveness, three different projects for three different areas were proposed. One projected for a new area called Downtown, comprising much of the old city centre and a few adjacent areas, particularly to the west; a second one to develop the coastline along the north-eastern suburbs, clearing a regional dumpsite that had developed over the war years; and a last one along the coastline of the south-western suburbs, building more decent social housing financed by the liberation of the coast for commercial development. In addition to these main projects, a few infrastructural projects were slated, such as a highway connecting Downtown to the airport and a ring road around Downtown.

The dimensions of (social) diversity, redevelopment or reconstruction are interrelated in the case of the Downtown reconstruction. Originally, in

13 The first came after the Two Year War (1977) and the second was developed between 1983 and ‘86.

1991, the project proposal called for the creation of a business and commercial style Downtown. The critiques from intellectual quarters that this unleashed led to a reconsideration. Instead of razing all the remaining built fabric (i.e., redevelopment), a section of the old city – mostly the area the French had built plus a few religious buildings – was to be preserved, whereas the larger surrounding area would be redeveloped, while maintaining some of the older street patterns. Rhetorically, ‘Downtown’ was to be the “heart” of Beirut, open to people from all aforementioned “walks of life”, and it would host a “garden of forgiveness” as a gesture to help the nation “heal the wounds of the war”. The general consensus in Beirut appears to be though that beyond rhetorics, the project did not do much to address and facilitate any substantial form of diversity, as it is seen as an elite space, catering only to those with substantial purchasing power (the “garden of forgiveness” is yet to materialize<sup>14</sup>).

The last aspect is a bundle of considerations we may call political-economic. It comprises at least three questions – which actor gets to execute the project; who are defined as stakeholders; as well as the status of property rights and tenancy deeds. How these questions were settled requires a little context. It is impossible to understand the actual reconstruction process without considering the role of Rafiq Hariri. While his actions and strategies are certainly not beyond the Lebanese pale, his creativity and tenacity in navigating planning culture and shaping and utilizing networks between private and public actors yielded a reconstruction project that would most likely have looked quite different otherwise. Thus, on his own account (and finances) he boldly commissioned the original New-York-to-Tokyo type Downtown proposal from the reputable Dar al-Handasah engineers, which set the terms of the discussion. At the same time, he managed to gain control (by proxy) over the Council for Reconstruction and Development (the CDR, created in 1977), formally responsible for setting up and supervising the framework for reconstruction. He then ran for parliament in 1992 and became PM – a function he would hold until his assassination in 2006, with only a two-year interruption in 1998. From this position, he was able to strengthen his hold over the reconstruction process, with increased clouts over appointments and the allocation of money flows.

The results of this concentration of power are notably the following. The locus of agency was going to be private: a special reconstruction company, Solidere, was called into being. The company would work within the con-

14 Though the official website <http://gardenofforgiveness.com> (retrieved 2015-01-11) asks us to stay tuned because “we are currently working on something awesome”.

finances of the general reconstruction mandate, but otherwise make development decisions on the basis of profitability. The requisite condition for that framework was to cancel all existing rights and claims to the area in favour of exclusive property rights for the company. Existing rights were transferred into shares in the company. This aspect of the reconstruction framework was probably even more controversial than the original skyscraper-architecture proposal, and its legality has always been disputed. The power thus vested in the company also allowed the speedy removal of the (mostly Shia) refugees that had settled to the west of the city centre, now part of Downtown. Their usufructuary claims to the area (based on at times decade long residence) – and the back-up provided by the Shia parties, Amal in particular – were bought off with Solidere supplements to the official compensation money for evacuated refugees that was available through the state.

Thus far, of the three Reconstruction projects, I have only discussed the Downtown project – though that priority runs entirely in parallel to the creators' intentions, as it was to be "the crown jewel" of the reconstruction. However, before going into the two remaining projects, note the absences – the Green Line, itself a long trail of destruction, was not included, nor were some of the areas adjacent to the 'Downtown' area, equally damaged. (Specifically, al-Khandaq al-Ghamiq was also left out. In the following chapter I discuss some of the consequences.) The deciding criterion on which areas to include appears to have been one of profitability – a consequence of the choice to delegate reconstruction to private parties. The project of the north-eastern littoral never materialized. The reasons were mostly technical in nature – the coastline geography didn't allow the kind of construction that would make clearing the landfill a profitable project. The project in the southern suburbs also did not reach completion. The story here is a bit more complicated.

The reconstruction (or really, redevelopment) project for the southern suburbs, dubbed Elyssar, was to re-organize, regularize and partially undo population displacement during the war, mostly of Shia refugees, in the western section of the southern suburbs, including its coastal strip. It was a 'slum-like' area (Fawaz and Peillen 2003) of hastily built houses and apartments on squatted land. The project was to (re)connect the area to Beirut proper by new infrastructure, provide access to the airport just to the south, improve living conditions in the neighbourhoods and capitalise on the valuable land on the coast (which included a resort [itself contested before the war] squatted by Amal for the sake of Shia refugees from East-Beirut).

Like Solidere's project, Elyssar was contested, even if it was less of a public contention, taking place primarily between (self-declared) political

representatives. The contention concerned some of the same aspects at stake in the Downtown project. The major issue was the recognition of property claims to the area: Amal and Hizbullah, who set themselves up as the representatives of the residents of the area, required the prevention of eviction as condition for their ratification. Instead on-site resettlement should accompany any necessary eviction. Secondly and relatedly, they refused the premise of a private actor as the agent of reconstruction. Instead, they successfully lobbied for the transformation of Elyssar into a public agency, which would guarantee their voice in planning decisions. Despite initial agreement on these amendments, the differences persisted. Work started on the highway connecting the airport and Downtown and resulted in the eviction-for-compensation practices the parties had sought to prevent. As a consequence, they prevented any progress beyond that highway<sup>15</sup>.

In connection to this latter project, it is instructive to consider one last reconstruction project, the reconstruction of the southern suburbs after the Israeli bombardments in the so-called July War, in 2006. It concerns roughly the same area and involves roughly the same actors, but is set in a different political and institutional context. Israel had targeted the area for bombardment because it considered it a Hizbullah 'stronghold' (for a discussion of this notion, see Deeb 2006), which, aside from the populist imagery here, was indeed the case. Hizbullah kicked out Amal out of most of the suburbs in the final years of the civil war, and had since progressively institutionalized its presence in the area. It provided some key utilities (such as water and electricity), formed the institutional backbone of various kinds of welfare provision (from sustenance to health), managed public order (traffic police, security) and was also behind many public religious processions and events.

The bombardments had caused, aside from extensive destruction, massive population displacement. Hizbullah's priority was to resettle people in the area as soon as possible, probably fearing people would settle into other places if they had to long to wait (I take most of the information below from Hilal 2007). This priority made much of how the reconstruction has taken place intelligible. Initially, the government had declared the task of reconstruction its own and formed a panel to form a reconstruction proposal. While the panel came up with some sensible planning suggestions, with regards to quality of residential life, it would entail rezoning the area. Also it advocated a decentralized approach. Both

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15 However as Huybrechts (2008) shows, an important result of the project was the recognition and regularization of the current inhabitants.

suggestions clashed with Hizbullah's desire to make haste. Legislation for zoning would be stalled in the political process; decentralization would entail loss of executive momentum. Instead then, it formed its own reconstruction agency, called Waad (Arabic for promise, referring to Hizbullah's promise to rebuild "more beautifully"). In response, the state restricted itself to providing compensation money to families. While the building committees that were set up were free to rebuild on their own, very few made that decision in the end, simply because of the logistical nightmare it posed. The scale of, and political clout behind, Waad's operations meant things would get done<sup>16</sup>.

In the following section I conclude this initial overview of the literature about Beirut, by showing how scholars have interpreted these reconstruction projects, in the light of the aforementioned 'lessons learned' from the civil war. That in turn will allow me to tie this chapter more directly back into the thread of this thesis, and return to the question in how far the works of these scholars can help us identify and understand kinds of politics and political subjectivity in Beirut.

### **Beirut sociology: territoriality from turf warfare to real-estate competition**

There is a fairly extensive literature surveying the various political economic dimensions of the reconstruction. The central concern in these works is, in one way or another, state formation. That is, while these studies tend to look at the projects as economic undertakings, the ultimate question is what they say about, or have meant for, the nature of the Lebanese state. Thus, a fairly straightforward costs and benefits analysis of the Downtown reconstruction by Becherer (2005) revolves around the analysis of a "Faustian pact" between private and public partners. In this pact, it is naturally the state who sold its soul, surrendering its autonomy to the 'private' sector, as it plunged into debt. Dibeh (2005), in a far less polemical report for the World Bank, also draws attention to the erroneous economic strategies and false underlying expectations behind the reconstruction project and the fiscal policies tied to it. The financial crisis that set in after the predictable end of the reconstruction boom, Dibeh argues, has led to a crisis of the state, which itself had never been 'rebuilt', nor had reconstruction involved the protection and fortification of civil society. Dibeh also formulates a critique that takes on 'political reconstruction' more head-on: in so far as redistribution took place it was done "horizontally", to satisfy (elite) confessional demands, rather than

<sup>16</sup> The sacrifice for expediency was the opportunity to structurally improve the quality of the built environment as a whole, mostly through de-densification.

“vertically”, to reduce class inequalities. The appropriation of rights of landowners in the city centre was symbolic for a disregard for civil society. These two points, individually or in conjunction, are reiterated by a number of other authors: political elites secured too much power over state organs and policy in the post-bellum era and – as a result – the actual reconstruction of the nation (its human and social capital, if you will), and the re-establishment of the authority of the state, were neglected. Thus Höckel (2007) argues that the focus on Downtown allowed ‘para-statal’ actors like Hizbullah to set up shop elsewhere<sup>17</sup>; Gebara (2007) attempts to show corruption has prevented serious state-building; Adwan & Sahyoun (2003) argue similarly, though from the opposite direction, that indeed rent-seeking prevailed over state-building, but that this form of corruption was made easier by the sectarian division of the state. These latter kinds of phenomena are called ‘capture of the state’ in the political scientific literature.

Leenders has produced a series of publications (2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2012) that detail and explicate this kind of ‘capture’ type corruption, in a way that is generally more helpful in getting a handle on ‘the nature of the Lebanese state’. His interest is in what corruption ‘does’. Rather than assuming a ‘weak’ state then, his assumption is that ‘corruption’ is actually an intrinsic part of state-formation (in this case, of ‘reconstruction’) and thus that it provides a lens on what kind of state is being built (in that sense a ‘weak’ state might actually be a quite effective one). More empirically then, state ‘capture’ occurs often when two factors are in play: extraction of natural resources and rentier-like sources of wealth (land in the case of Solidere); and ‘hybrid’ organizations and networks that straddle public and private (both of which were in play in the way Hariri & Co. organized the reconstruction). In both cases, either boundaries are not – yet – clear or older (economic) practices become classified as ‘corruption’ in a reconstruction setting, where the boundaries themselves become subject to scrutiny and contestation. The issue underlying these analyses is the tension between territory (land) and sovereignty (public-private cross-overs). Concern with issue reverberates through many discussions, public and scholarly.

In addition to this political economic literature, various authors (Makdisi 1997, Cooke 2002, Kassab 1997, Sawalha 1998) have drawn attention to

17 Huybrechts & Verdeil (2000) look at similar phenomena, but from a planner’s perspective and note more dryly that while the central government is an important actor in terms of investments, because it is weak (i.e. badly coordinated), it leaves considerable space for local actors to pursue their own interests.

the extensive symbolic production that accompanied the reconstruction of the 'Downtown' area. Makdisi even claimed the project would

help to determine the unfolding narrative of Lebanon's national identity, which is now even more open to question. For it is in this highly contested space that various competing visions of that identity, as well as of Lebanon's relationship to the region and the wider Arab world, will be fought out (1997: 663).

The reconstruction was therefore the occasion of various parties to "lay claim" to Beirut (in Makdisi's analysis these parties were chiefly the Solidere company versus the intellectuals). This same kind of competition was identified by Sawalha, who examined how Solidere related to the (mostly Shia) refugees who had settled on the western edges of the old centre. The refugees used various tropes to claim some right to their place in the area, based on their length to stay there, their emotional ties to their home or to the fact they had purchased their residence (in the war's black market). Sawalha (2003: 276f.) explains however that popular perception tended not to be on their side, with public voices advocating their eviction in order to "heal the wounds of the war", given that their very physical presence in Beirut's old centre was a symbol and reminder of all that went wrong during the war. Thus, their moral claims to the area became mere rhetorical complements to the negotiations between their political representatives and Solidere, which ended with the latter paying dearly for the refugees' eviction so as to expedite the reconstruction process.

These negotiations were widely framed as territorial competition<sup>18</sup>. A parallel consequence was that a new sense of territoriality was encoded in Beirut's geography. In a popularly shared perception (see e.g. 2006-08-04, New York Times, Michael Young), Shia 'withdrew' from the city centre, and symbolically, their political parties 'relinquished' their claim to representing the area. Instead, Shia refugees and their political parties were seen to 'regroup' in the southern suburbs. Numerous studies have since documented how the ties between political representatives – foremost Hizbullah – and constituency have been tightened in those same suburbs. Bou Akar (2005) documents how many of the refugees from the Downtown were provided social housing type abodes with the compensation money they were given (Bou Akar uses the case to analyse

18 They were also in part the basis for e.g. Yahya's 1993 analysis of the relation between territory and political authority, discussed in the section outlining the urban sociology of the war.



how sectarian conflict plays out on different scales and in both formal and informal governance mechanisms). Harb in a series of studies (2001, 2007; Harb & Fawaz 2010) looks at the parties' engagement with Elyssar, as well as how more everyday and smaller-scale forms of governance have solidified their political authority (both to 'insiders' and 'outsiders') in and over the area and its residents. Deeb builds on these studies and provides a more ethnographic account of the workings of this institutional complex – largely by focusing on female volunteers working for and with charity organizations. This exploration of the everyday instantiation of the culture of Hizbullah's 'Resistance society' later found a follow-up with her collaboration with Harb (2013) on the 'leisure' ecology that has been developed within this 'culture'. Fawaz (2009) and Hilal (2007, under Fawaz' supervision) analysed the lead that Hizbullah took in the reconstruction of the southern suburbs within this same vein, as an attempt to maintain political authority in and over an important 'territory'.

So there are two paradigms that organize the literature on post-war Beirut: one is the 'capture' of the state, in the political economy literature, and for which Downtown is considered the exemplar. The other is the idea of post-war political territoriality (or territorialized political rule), for which the southern suburbs have been paradigmatic. As regards the first paradigm, the political economic analyses have been extended to real-estate construction by Fawaz (especially on low-end development: 2009; 2009b) and collaborators (especially on high-end development: Krijnen & Fawaz 2010; Wierzborski 2010), who look at how private actors manage to create favourable conditions for their operations. (Specifically sectarian territorialities retreat to the background in this literature, though. The tension in the triad real-estate, sect and territory returns in the following chapter.) As for the second paradigm, the southern suburbs case appears to have informed later studies in Beirut, prompting comparative analyses of other (but similar) territorial dynamics. Thus, on the one hand there are attempts to re-think political power per se in the city. Kastrissianakis (2012) proposes a reading of violence in Beirut as the product of a system of urban governances that is based on the competition of several non-state sovereignties (while empirically drawing largely on the polarization between Hariri's Downtown and Hizbullah's southern suburbs). Fregonese (2012) makes a quite similar argument, drawing on cases from the civil war and the clashes between Hizbullah forces and armed factions of opposed political parties in 2008. Her proposal is to see Beirut as a case of "hybrid sovereignties", where the "traditional" distinction between state and non-

state becomes irrelevant and unhelpful.<sup>19</sup> (Kastrissianakis, meanwhile, to propose more or less the same thing, builds on Sloterdijk's "spherical" imagery and Seurat's (1985) resurrection of Ibn Khaldun's notion of *asabiya*.) On the other hand you will find studies that explore the contestation of space and what (political, confessional) territories look like on the ground (Masri 2006, primarily thinking through such contestation through the lens of identity; Bou Akar 2012, transposing the problematic of 'territory' into a 'security' framework).

There is one final strand of research I would like to draw attention to. This strand displaces the focus of attention from the political actors to ordinary citizens, often exchanges the paradigmatic cases for other areas in Beirut, and asks how people navigate the 'sectarian' city. The question of territoriality is therefore still in the background (and sometimes in the foreground). This is immediately apparent in one of the dominant concerns and tropes in this literature, which is that of public space. The question whether public spaces exist in Beirut, and if so, how public they in fact are, is actually a particular Lebanese twist of a question that is perhaps a defining feature of a *regional* scholarship (public spaces are highly sought after scarce goods in "MENA" research). Thus, there are a number of studies of open space in the city and their function in facilitating a genuinely public (i.e., trans-confessional) type of sociality and urbanity. Genberg (2002; 2003) tries to figure out which places in Beirut people can come to where they are not always bearers of a certain sectarian identity (the Corniche, mostly). Shayya (2010) mapped out social interactions in the small open section of the largely closed-off park "Horsh Beirut" and advocates it be opened to the public (declaring it is ready for the responsibility). In a more political vein, Chaoul (2007) surveys the possibilities and modalities of staging public protest in Beirut. Another recurring public 'space' is one beloved by Beirut's middle classes – the cafés. Sawalha (2010) portrays the self-consciously "public" sociality, its historical imagination and accompanying aspirations of women from the middle classes in cafés, mostly in Hamra.<sup>20</sup> Farah (2011), meanwhile, considers how residents on the borderline between Christian and Muslim suburbs use and

19 The choice for these recurrent cases becomes problematic once one starts looking at different ones, as I contend and show in the following chapter.

20 Hamra's cafés, as a backbone of the area's "intellectual" reputation, deserved a special overview by Douaihi (1994). Salamey & Tabar (2008) seem to place their hope for a non-violent Lebanon in the hands of the Hamra regulars, whose ("secular") political perceptions need to be bolstered. (This contrasts with the Downtown area, which was heavily *branded* as a public space but was precisely perceived as having failed to fulfil that 'promise'. The 2005 demonstrations against Syrian 'tutelage' have been framed as understood as a function of the nation's premier public space [Khalaf 2006; 2012].)

value a more popular kind of public space, in dealing with their historically conditioned mutual “alterity”<sup>21</sup>.

The trope of territoriality then, developed largely retrospectively immediately after the war, extends to a wide range of scholarly works on Beirut. There are a number of common themes that emerge. One is that the territorial logic of political competition during the war is preserved (political actors are still in the business of “claiming space”), but its means are transposed from warfare to (access to) real-estate. The three paradigmatic reconstruction cases – Solidere, Elyssar and Waad – show that control over areas is achieved by securing access to land. (One of the ways this theme is discussed is in terms of the relations between statehood, sovereignty and territory. These are also the underlying questions that preoccupy many Beirutis, in how they talk about the challenges for Lebanon, about who they are in the polity, and what they think the relation between sect and state should be. See also Chapter 4.) A second theme is that territoriality remains not merely central to the reproduction of political power (as in the paradigmatic example of Hizbullah’s “stronghold” or “bastion” in the southern suburbs), but also maintains its pervasive influence on Beirutis’ social imagination (the cognitive sectarian closure that e.g. Khalaf and Sarkis talked about). From this theme, one can also understand the preoccupation with public space, which, in the Lebanese context, really is the inverse of territorial space. Thirdly, the polarization between the North of Beirut (Solidere’s Downtown) and its South (Hizbullah’s suburbs) organize this trope iconically. The opposition between the two is a pronounced feature of popular political imagination, which manifested itself for example in the widely used trope of “invasion” to characterize Hizbullah’s clashes with government-loyal forces in 2008, which occurred in Beirut proper. It will also pop up here and there in the remainder of this thesis, as it allows for an anchor point in relation to which people can situate themselves morally and politically.

**Conclusion** I already dropped a few hints at how the events and their interpretations may be relevant for the present investigation. Let me be more systematic about it now. Reiterating, the main conclusions from the literature are 1) that politics operates in a large degree on an territorial basis and 2) people have learned to see themselves as inhabitants of sec-

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21 A more playful take on such a navigation of over-determined spaces is Chakar’s (2003) proposition to understand Beirutis not as dwellers but as tourists, always waiting to perform in (someone else’s, political actors’) spectacle – one caught in the inevitable snapshot of the observer (foreigner, media).

tarian islands, wary of others living on other islands. Both seem directly relevant for a question after conceptions and practices of citizenship. The imbrication of rule and politics in the spaces of everyday life should certainly impact how people view their sectarian membership (in the way it is shaped by religious and political organizations), the nation and the state (as these are perceived relationally to sectarian membership), and their own role (the scope for action they see and exercise within these spaces of everyday living). What then is role of territorialization in constituting people's political subjectivity and what place does 'territory' occupy in people's political imagination?

The next chapter goes into the first 'case-study', the Khandaq neighbourhood. Khandaq really is a different 'case', from the ones mentioned thus far. For starters, it has not been the focus of a lot of reconstructive attention. It is however closely tied, geographically, to the Downtown area; yet at the same time, its population is largely Shia – and politically tied to parties who are symbolically tied to the southern suburbs. Little research has been carried out in the neighbourhood (though more research has been undertaken of late about neighbourhoods that similarly have not enjoyed the political or economic limelight). Clear from the start though is that it isn't one of these paradigmatic cases. Hence, questions for the following chapter include: What is the 'territorial' status of Khandaq al-Ghamiq? Is the logic of territorial competition operative? What, if any, is the influence of the territorial imagination on people's perception of who they are (what moral community they think they belong to) and what role do they play in the political community?

## Chapter 2:

# Urban politics in the margins of reconstruction

Having surveyed the general Beirut scene in the previous chapter, we move into my first research site, al-Khandaq al-Ghamiq. Following up on the preceding chapter's theme of territorialization, this chapter approaches the neighbourhood from a particular angle: to understand the way the neighbourhood is made as geographical entity, in the morphology of both its social tissue and urban fabric. It includes discussion of themes common to urban studies such as the politics of space (struggles over the power to claim and shape the identity of and the action within space and place), that quintessential Marxist concept of the production of space (closely tied to the preceding, but more specifically within an analysis of capitalist mechanisms of accumulation), and the tactics and strategies that residents employ to navigate the threats and opportunities that both the politics and production of space presents them. I discuss these themes in order to situate the neighbourhood and its people, to show whether and how it might fit in 'territorialized' politics, and whether and how that may translate into residents' political imagination.

**Discovering Khandaq** Al-Khandaq al-Ghamiq (Arabic for what may be translated as 'the deep trench'<sup>22</sup>) is a neighbourhood that is centrally located, just south of Downtown, with three major thoroughfares flanking it to the north, south and east. Yet, it appears to occupy a marginal position in the city's public life. Consider the narratives in the following journalistic descriptions of the neighbourhood. It doesn't figure too often in newspaper articles, which in itself is not unusual for a working-class

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22 Etymological explanations vary: whether it was because the road called *al-khandaq al-ghamiq* actually functioned as a trench or gutter for rains travelling downhill along the walls of the Bachoura cemetery, or because it's an allusion to the depression of the neighbourhood relative to the two flanking hills of the neighbourhoods Achrafiye and Zoqaq al-Blat.

neighbourhood, but in the few features in which the neighbourhood does figure prominently, it is conveyed in the prose of travel literature, the language of the explorer covering strange and unknown territory<sup>23</sup>. For instance, in a series of articles that present a 'survey' of poverty in Lebanon, one instalment covers Khandaq. The article opens thus:

Al-Khandaq al-Ghamiq can be likened only to itself. It is a gutter [*khan-daqa*] murky with poverty and steeped [*amīq`amaq*: 'very deep', a play on the synonymous *ghamīq*] in social and economic woes, full of indignation towards the state, whose Ministry for Social Affairs fails to consider the plight of the deprived citizen. In this gutter pains begin and never end. Its alleyways are full of bitterness, the fissures of its crumbling buildings tell stories of abandonment, and the ancient, dark stairways emit the smell of disability and sickness. (An-Nahar, 1996-11-11, Mary Zuhrib)

The confrontation with unexpected poverty and neglect often translates into a narrative frame of the striking difference between Khandaq and its surroundings. Rahif Fayyad, an architect who has often participated in public debates about the (architectural) history and future of the city, wrote a series of articles in which he describes his wonderings through the older neighbourhoods of the city. When he comes to Khandaq, he can't help but notice "a rude rupture" between what the area once was, before the war, and what it is now, bereft of "rehabilitation and renovation, lost amid neglect"<sup>24</sup>. When he moves into the neighbourhood, "the generalized deterioration manifests itself in a surreal, perplexing scene (*mashhad suriāli, `ajīb*)" (As-Safir, 2002-11-01).

A portrait of the neighbourhood in the respectable, left-leaning newspaper As-Safir is structured along the same lines. The article opens with a description of the same street that Fayyad depicted, but now with scenes of war, including men from the Biqaa (an eastern province (in)famous for its military training camps), sporting kuffiyas and setting up a road block. The scene subsequently turns out to be part of a set for a film about the Lebanese war, but narratively of course, the effect is to place the area back in the days of war. The article goes on to situate the neighbourhood:

23 This unfamiliarity is also reflected in my own experiences: few people I encountered had heard of it and many expressed surprise at my geographical explications.

24 *yudīr wasaṭ al-ihmāl* – one could also read this as a pun on *wasat al-tijāri*, the business centre, another common name for city centre; the translation would then read "the centre of neglect is lost".

Syriac street is one of Khandaq al-Ghamiq's streets in Bachoura<sup>25</sup>. Its lower end culminates in the Fouad Chehab bridge, by which it is brutally cut off. Before the [construction of the] bridge, the street continued until it reached the centre [*al-balad*]. The war destroyed much [*nalat minhu*], but after Solidere, the street was divided into two parts, while retaining the single name. The first part, before the bridge, stayed the same, and the second, lucky part became part of the centre [i.e., Solidere]. A luxurious hotel arises on it now. It doesn't take after its other half (*al-shāri` la yishbah tatimatahu*). (2007-04-19, As-Safir, Jihad Bazzi)

Again, the sense of contrast is vividly painted in a neighbourhood portrait, which focuses on the fate of the, generally quite poor, residents of a so-called *ḥawsh*. A *ḥawsh* is a collection of residences around a shared court – often, though not always, in an older building that was later subdivided into different homes (the subdivision is usually illegal or irregular, thus this is the kind of home for those with an uncertain hold on the city).

[The identity of the] area arises out of its extreme poverty, on a site where one would expect the willingness to invest millions of dollars. Let's examine it up closer. This leads us to Thieves' Alley. [...] The inhabitants spend their evening sitting next to the wall of the [Bachoura] cemetery and spend hours of the night listening to the 'nights of the new Downtown'. Their houses, or what pass for houses, are quite close to the centre of Beirut, which bustles with life deep into the night and rings its tunes of joy. The local kids clap, from where they are, to Beirut. And the adults spend their night clapping for their kids who dance to the music from 'Downtown'.

How strange, this differentiated mingling across a few meters in Beirut between wealth and poverty, beauty and ugliness, development and obsolescence. (Sada al-Balad, 2005-10-16, Nawal Nasr)

### **Dereliction and speculation in the old Christian neighbourhood**

The authors of the newspaper clippings recurrently highlight the difference between the adjacent 'downtown' area, the site of the reconstruction, and Khandaq, the site of neglect. As will become clearer in the sections to follow, this is not an entirely honest depiction of the entire neighbourhood, as there is much more to it than that, even though the disjunction actu-

25 The name of the official district it is part of.

ally does resonate with many residents' sense of their place in the city<sup>26</sup>. The journalistic descriptions in fact focus on the old Christian neighbourhood, an area largely confined to the north-east corner of Khandaq (see map on following page). By the end of the 1960s it was inhabited mostly by Syriac Catholics and Armenians, though by that time a steady stream was trickling out of the neighbourhood, especially among the former. The Syriac Catholics had built this part of the neighbourhood. They had migrated, fled sometimes, to Beirut since 1810 and had come to constitute a critical mass roughly by the second half of that century. To consecrate and sustain their presence they built the St. George church (see picture for its carcass on page 48), in one of the main streets of Khandaq, which was finished in 1883. In 1900, the bifurcating street ('Syriān street') became the seat of the Patriarchate. However, when the Patriarch decided to move the seat to the south of the city in 1930, this initiated a slow movement out of Khandaq, primarily by those who could afford to do so. When in 1958, Saeb Salem<sup>27</sup> orchestrated a (mostly Sunni) uprising against the presidency of Camille Chamoun, which also (obliquely) affected Khandaq, fighting may have accelerated the process.

However, as mentioned previously, the Christians, including the Armenians, left definitively only during the Two Year War. Soon they were replaced by Shia refugees from East Beirut and South Lebanon, who occupied their homes and stayed there throughout the war years. After the war, Khandaq, despite the heavy damages it sustained, was not included in the Solidere plan for reconstruction, whose southern limits were set to the Fouad Chehab boulevard.<sup>28</sup> The refugees, due to the uncertainty of their situation, not knowing how long they would be able to stay in their homes, also did little to maintain or renovate their buildings. Between 2000 and 2004 the vast majority of the refugees were finally evicted (see further down in this chapter). This left an area that already looked decidedly shoddy, with war damages both light and severe, general dilapidation and empty plots, now abandoned. The scene would indeed be striking upon first encounter, as it was for the journalists.

26 In Chapter 4 I show how their sense of 'neglect' – on a Beirut plane – also reflects back on their sense of their place in the country as a whole.

27 One of the greater Beirut notable politicians of the pre-1975 era. Sunni and at some point tied to the Abdel Nasser's brand of pan-Arabism.

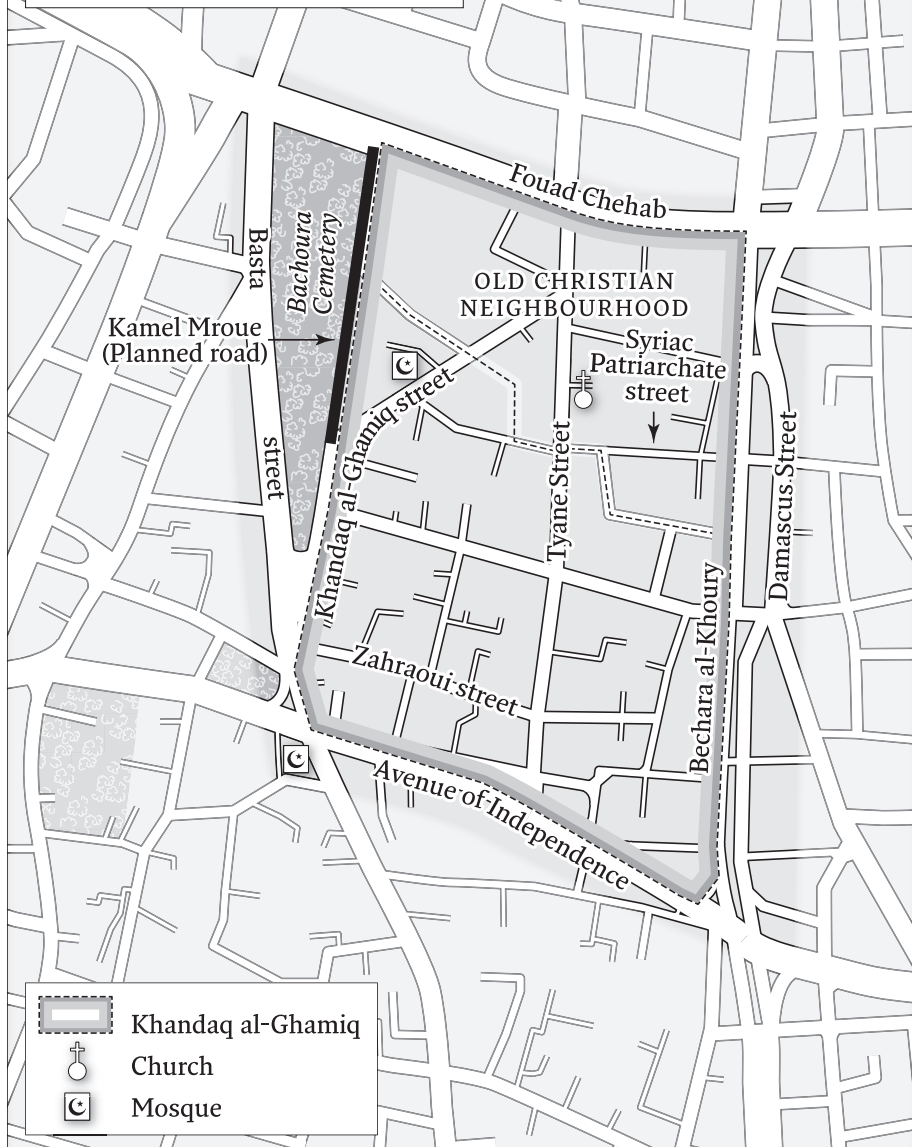
28 While there were symbolic reasons to do so – the Reconstruction focused on 'the heart of the city', Downtown Beirut, architect Assem Salem, then head of the Order of Engineers, supposed the exclusion of Khandaq and similar areas was for simple financial calculations. "The money they [Solidere] were going to invest in it had to be limited – so the geographic limits were more imposed by financial conditions than by urban conditions. [...] The aim of the project was simply a real estate investment. There was no political or reunification aim. This amount of land, this amount of money." (Interview November 2009)



# Bachoura district

0 m 250

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St. George Church and the northern half of the 'Christian neighbourhood'.

Yet, it is not completely abandoned. A retired officer of the internal security forces and his wife still live across from the now ruined church; Abu Fadi, once “the only Muslim in my street”, now squats an art nouveau building that is on the list of protected heritage, on the corner from the church. Then on the last side street before the Fouad Chehab bridge you will find Jammal, the *fawwāl*<sup>29</sup>. He runs his little restaurant from ‘the Armenian building’, which is empty but for one last family on the top floor, and a paper and printing company in the basement. The restaurant contains three small tables, a kitchen of 2x1 m., two small posters of Martyr’s Square – the main square in Downtown – from before the war, next to an old picture of the Pigeon Rock, a tourist attraction off the seaside boulevard (see picture on following page). Right next to the entrance, underneath the light switch, Jammal taped a business card he had someone fashion a few years ago, which he showed with what seemed to be a mix of pride and irony. He’d been considering the business card more seriously lately though. He needed to start thinking about delivery, in order to survive in these empty surroundings.

The consideration to extend the geographical reach of his customer base is not entirely unwarranted. It was in fact something of a surprise to me

<sup>29</sup> The *fawwāl* prepares *fūl* and *hummus* plates, out of fava beans and chick peas, for breakfast and lunch.



Nostalgic (and ubiquitous) imagery of pre-war Beirut in Jammal's café.

to find the *fūl* shop where it was, amidst the lifeless pocket-holed buildings and empty plots, overgrown or full of rubble. His three tables were almost never all full – his customers consisted of a number of loyal customers that came and look him up every once in a while, a few residents in the streets up towards the actual neighbourhood, where he delivered, and some of the Syrian workers who worked in the construction projects at the end of the street. But while these projects were only at the end of the street, whenever we gazed upon them, they seemed far away, as if they belonged to another world. It was always quiet near Jammal's *fūl* shop. So he nearly always had time for a chat. And as our chats developed over the weeks, it turned out the construction projects were in fact a very real part of his life.

Jammal told tales of better times and the history of his restaurant. He inherited it from his father. In fact, he and his brother, who would help him out with smaller things, are the third generation *fūl* makers in the family. Still two other members of the family were in the business – one of them, an uncle, worked a few blocks up, in Zahrawi street, the main retail street in Khandaq. The other was in the nearby Basta neighbourhood. But they will be the last generation. Their children are going to school and will work in something better. *What future is there still in this fūl business*, he asked rhetorically and sighed. *The civil war has hurt us*. His father had

to close during the war years because the shop was located too close to the Green Line. Jammal went to work in a Lebanese fast-food restaurant in the Hamra district, but the family suffered a financial setback. It was the reason his brother was still single: business was decent back then and had the war not forced them to close, they would have been able to make enough money for his brother to be an interesting candidate, they would have been able to buy a place. There had already been talk between two families, but in the end the other family declined because of this very reason. After the war, they re-opened, and while business might not have been the way it once was, the area still had all the refugees living in it and the money was ok. Now, though, with the refugees gone, Jammal estimates that he has about half the customers he had in the direct post-war period. But the costs are still there – and they have increased even, *just think of the costs of the electricity when I store my unsold foul beans overnight, in the fridge, or of the gas to heat them up again.* (Why, just now, he wanted to go to Hawa Chicken, a poultry based butcher and supermarket chain, to get some *kibbe* for home: *yesterday the price was still 7000LL and now 8,000LL – a price hike of a 1,000LL in the space of a day!*)

However, more grave than all that, there had been a sword of Damocles hanging over his head since the building he rented his shop in was bought, at the time about 2 years prior, by someone who wanted to tear down the Armenian building and erect a tower. *From there all the way to there*, he pointed to the construction sites at the end of the street, and then to the far end of Khandaq on the other side, *it's all going to be towers.* Over the past years he had been negotiating with the new owner about the amount of their eviction money. They were paying 'old rent', which means there is no natural end to the contract and they thus were protected from eviction. There are legal grounds upon which they could be evicted, but in such cases, the owner does have to give them a market-conform compensation (a certain percentage of the value of the property). Such negotiations are generally lengthy affairs with rather different perspectives of what a reasonable amount would be. Jammal told me that two years ago an expert (*khabīr*) had come to evaluate the property and determine their compensation. There are a number of such experts registered with the court and the latter calls upon them to make independent, neutral evaluations to settle the difference between owner and tenant. The expert had evaluated his 'cut' at "\$70,000 or \$80,000"; the new owner wanted to give no more than "\$30,000 or 40,000". Yet, he explained, there is big money in this project – *this whole area will be a Solidere II*, by which Jammal meant a large commercial centre with towers. ('Solidere II' is a term that circulates more widely in the neighbourhood, though its mean-

ing varied. For some, instead, it meant a new and pretty faux-historical residential neighbourhood.) A large-scale project, in other words, and he had heard that prices per m<sup>2</sup> had been up to \$11,000<sup>30</sup>. So the new owner *must* have a lot of money – still he wasn't willing to pay the amount that was due to him – *somewhere between \$75,000 and \$100,000*, that is (rounding the expert's estimate in his favour).

Whether it would be \$40,000 or the hoped for \$80,000 though, Jammal saw no possibility of opening up a new venue somewhere else with such money. Buying a place is out the question, that goes without saying. Still, even in terms of rent, he would have to pay at least \$400 or \$500 per month in Basta, just south of Khandaq; along the Bechara al-Khoury main road, where many *sha'bi* (popular, lower-class) cafés and 'ovens' have settled of late, it was \$1,000. Then you have Monot street (just beyond Bechara al-Khoury, and a nightlife hotspot): *someone opened up a similar place there, he's made it look nice, but that man is also asking 6000LL for a plate – I can't do that here* (Jammal's recently raised his price to 3500LL), *people here won't pay that kind of money*. All of these options were not financially viable, in his opinion. And so, he saw no future for his children in *fūl*.

**Khandaq's refugees and the politics of displacement** The preceding two sections tell a story of abandonment, speculation and uncertainty. These are three themes that will come up in different guises and permutations in this chapter (and the following two). I will develop these themes step by step. The first step is to attend to the scene of a kind of limbo above. While perhaps not "surreal", it is still puzzling and demands some explication. In particular, what does it say about the status of territorial politics?

If we want to understand that particular moment in the trajectory of the neighbourhood, obviously the war would be a good starting point. However, we should not consider simply 'the war' in general, but more particularly one of its consequences: displacement. Beirut grew explosively during the war years, because of displacement to the capital. It led to new burst of construction, primarily outside of the existing city, in the new 'suburbs', where undeveloped space was in relative abundance, and land rights were not quite clear, or could still be acquired relatively cheaply. Within the city itself, displacement led first of all to occupation of existing, mostly abandoned, housing stock. Later, older buildings and empty lots were replaced by new apartment towers as Beirut's population continued to grow and the war economy generated surplus accumulation at the top of the militias that needed re-investment (see e.g.

30 Not entirely unlikely, such were prices for high-end areas at the time.



Traboulsi 2007: 237). Both phases are represented in Khandaq, though I will only come to the second phase later on.

For now I focus on those refugees who found refuge in other people's homes. The contrast between Khandaq and Beirut's "Central Business District" comes out clearly with the differential treatment of the displaced after the war. The choice to focus reconstruction on the current Downtown perimeter only and not on the – equally damaged – Khandaq neighbourhood led to a quick 'resolution' of the refugee question (i.e. eviction) in the Solidere business district, and opened up the area for redevelopment.<sup>31</sup> However, because Khandaq was left out, there was no such urgency and the question of its displaced population languished under political stalemates. This section recounts that history – the policy of return, the politics of the actual negotiations and its players, and the specific fate of the Khandaq refugees. This will show us a first glimpse of the 'territorial status' of the area.

The question of the displaced was one of the prime political issues directly after the war. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 'return to normal' was paramount. In 1992 therefore, the Ministry for Displaced was set up. The Ministry had three goals: to facilitate 1) the eviction of displaced from squatted property; 2) the return of the property owners and 3) the mediation of conflict in instances of displacement due to particularly intense internecine conflict (such as between Druze and Christians in the Chouf mountain). The history of the implementation of this policy is rather fraught though. Two major fault lines ran through the Ministry – the controversy over Mount Lebanon between the Druze and Christians and the status of Sunni Beirut and their relation to the new Sunni political leader, Rafiq Hariri. Both caused a certain degree of paralysis in the execution of the Ministry's mandate, as different factions fought over the power to channel the Ministry's cash flow. Hariri therefore created the *Fund* for the Displaced, officially the executive organ of the Ministry, but factually autonomous (and devoid of statutes regulating its transparency). Its creation came out of the Hariri's desire to direct money flows to his Sunni constituency outside of the purview of the Ministry. (Interview Fadi Aramouny, March 2012; cf. Leenders 2012: 116ff.). These conflicts slowed down the negotiation process for many cases, including those who lived in Khandaq.

31 When a new director ascended to the Fund for the Displaced in 1998 (cf. below), he did initiate a new program to renovate the façades of buildings whose owners could not be tracked. This included buildings in Khandaq. The project was aborted when a new government cut the money flow to the Fund. Had it been allowed to continue, these 'investments' into the area might have changed its subsequent urban fortunes.

In Khandaq, one estimate puts the number of displaced families living in Khandaq at 523, making a total of 3182 people (Faour 1993). Nawwar was one of those people. Before the war, as a young boy, Nawwar lived in Nabaa, a working-class suburb of East Beirut that many Shia had moved to over the preceding decades. Like all other Shia they left the area when the Phalanges embarked on clearing all of West Beirut of Muslims. Nabaa was evacuated with the mediation of emerging Shia leader Musa Sadr, without casualties. Nawwar's family retreated to the South in 1975 and sought a way to return to Beirut in 1976, after the first round of fighting had died down. Nawwar had an uncle living in Khandaq who told his father there were houses, closed but empty, left behind by the Christians and they weren't going to come back. Nawwar's family was the first to open one of the Christian homes, he says. They were to be followed by many more, in total some 40 buildings were squatted in Khandaq, the majority of which had been owned or inhabited by Christians. While Nawwar's family had heard of these potential houses through family, many were brought in by various figures of authority who themselves assumed the role of assigning families to buildings (and the apartments within them, and sometimes to rooms within the apartments). Through a *mukhtar*<sup>32</sup>, a local big man, a party or militia, people were guided to new dwellings – whether in the name of humanitarian assistance in dire times or in expectation of political fidelity. Nawwar by that time was well-installed though. Over the course of the war he built up his life there, he met a girl he liked, from a family that had previously lived in the fancier Sin al-Fil suburb, also in East Beirut, and they got married on the rooftop of the 'Armenian building'. She first moved in with him in his family's house, but soon, probably as arranged before, her uncle moved to the United States and bequeathed their house to them. This is where they lived until 2004.

In the period between the official end to the war in 1990 and 2004 there had been several attempts by the state to re-establish normality and return the Christian houses to their rightful owners and allow the Shia to return to their own old houses. The political conflicts within the Ministry's in part explain why it took 12 years for the Ministry to succeed in evicting the Shia from their Khandaq residences. A second factor of delay was the parties' involvement in the various forms of negotiation between displaced squatters and the Ministry and Fund. Just like the parties had arranged for many people to find new dwellings during the war, they were also often managing their departure from these buildings. They did so for the

32 A local representative, see next chapter.

same reasons they found homes for them in the first place (as described in Chapter 1): on the one hand, as fodder in political competition, as Yahya observes: “The question of their return was transformed into a bargaining chip in the hands of these now institutionalized militias” (1993: 136f.). On the other hand, it was undoubtedly part of establishing political relations at the level of the constituency – the service (here, housing) for loyalty game. In order to thus support its constituency, the parties sat at the negotiation table, but they also showed up as muscles in the street (interview Fadi Aramouny, March 2012; interview anonymous employee of the Ministry for the Displaced, January 2012), when the Ministry (and the internal security forces) showed up with the eviction notice, forcing the Ministry to retreat to contact the party member charged with refugee affairs.

Several of these elements also come out in Nawwar’s story. There had been evictions in Khandaq over the course of the 1990s. Most of these evictions took place at the initiative of individual buildings owners – though none of the Christian owners, to my knowledge<sup>33</sup> – only Sunni or (new) Shia owners. Also, it appears as though some of the refugees accepted the open offers by the Ministry to apply for their compensation. Until 1999, the standard sum for compensation stood at \$15,000. But the people who accepted these sums were a minority. People’s expectations about their own eviction appear to have been influenced by the high compensation amounts that were dispensed for the displaced from the ‘Solidere’ area. As Nawwar explained, *the situation was uncertain. We didn’t know if we could get more money. And so they waited.* Then in 1999, Hariri was temporarily ousted from power and a government came to power that tried to loosen his grip on Lebanon, and a new director also ascended to the throne of the Fund of the Displaced. His mandate and personal goal was to finally ‘close the files’ of the replaced. In that year, the Ministry issued a warning to the displaced of al-Khandaq for them to leave the premises within a short delay; the newspaper reporting (As-Safir, 1999-08-25, Jaber) on the warning suggests it came in the middle of failing negotiations between the Ministry and the displaced. The Fund’s new policy for all displaced, home owners and squatters, was to dole out 5,000 as recompense for eviction and \$8,000 for the renovation of one’s (reclaimed) house. This was a \$10,000 step down from previous sums issued by the Fund, which will sure to have been a factor in their resistance (through their party representatives) to this new regime. The official reasons cited for their refusal

33 Though it appears (cf. Al-Akhbar, 2012-07-16, Muhsen) that in 2000 people were already evicted from the church’s properties.



were that the compensations could not afford a new apartment, especially considering the government hadn't built new affordable ones as promised; that for those from the South it was unlikely they could go back anyway (as the region was still under Israeli occupation); and that there were several "irregularities" in the administration of the affair, and some people feared they would not receive compensation if they would leave within the term set by the government.

Thus, nothing happened in 1999 and the pressure was off the cooker for a while when the new Hariri government defunded the project in 2000. There was talk about moving the project of collective evacuation forward, but it was not until 2004 that something actually happened. I was unable to find out what changed precisely (party representatives were not available for comment). The deal was the following though: a committee of representatives to the displaced was formed, a common practice especially on the village level, and they were responsible for handing in a list of the families living in the remaining 35 buildings. Many families registered more families living in a building than actually present, in order to receive larger benefits (as supposedly happened with refugees in the Solidere area as well). Nawwar for example, registered a friend's family and thus obtained \$10,000 in compensation (minus a \$500 cut for his friend). (Most likely the Fund was well aware of – and familiar with – this but closed an eye because it was part of the resolution of the problem.)

The war-time displacement, the prolonged presence of the refugees post-bellum because of the limits of the Solidere reconstruction plan, then the political stalemates in the Ministry for the Displaced, all explain in large part the puzzling contrast of the area with its immediate environment. What remains to be explained is why after the evictions of 2004, the area wouldn't have been rebuilt. I deal with this question in a following section. For the moment, I want to dwell on the fact that after covering for the displaced for over a decade, the Shia parties then abandoned that policy, working out a compromise solution. In so doing, they abandoned the logic of territorialisation as we have come to understand it in Chapter 1, where the defence of residential presence was a stake of the highest political charge. In the next section I want to draw out some implications for this point.

**Territoriality beyond the divided city** With the parties relinquishing control over this part of the neighbourhood with their agreement to the terms of eviction, the area strikes a dissonant chord in relation to the more well-known cases of urban politics discussed in the previous chapter. Here, the parties appear to abandon the logic of territorialisation (rather

than continuing to pursue with other means). That logic knows various expressions: as a (quasi)-military strategy, to control key areas; as defence of sectarian presence in a given space to service needs to the constituency; or to use such presence to shore up claims in the political playing field. In terms of the first, it's somewhat inconclusive, for despite the evictions, up until the time of my fieldwork at least, the parties still policed and used the space. In terms of the second and third dimensions, that is not what we see. Most of the evicted refugees left the neighbourhood, as far as I was able to establish. Nawwar was one of the 'lucky ones'. While they spent the compensation money relatively quickly on rent in a Basta apartment (at the time the family was living off his \$500 civil servant salary), a local Hizbullah representative was able to house them in a building, once appropriated by the municipality and now empty, and which he now managed. Otherwise, Nawwar was able to name very few families that still lived there. According to a resident of a building bordering on the old Christian neighbourhood, people had left for the South, for the southern suburbs, and he knew some families who had still not been able to find stable residence.

It must be noted that the eviction strikes an equally dissonant cord with the perception of the (Shia) residents of the neighbourhood. To many, the neighbourhood is indeed a 'territory' that is in need of defence. This comes out clearly in the way the real-estate developments since the eviction are talked about. In order to understand residents' perspectives though, we need to understand some of the context and what kind of developments we are talking about precisely. At the time of my fieldwork, Beirut was in the middle of real-estate boom<sup>34</sup>, which had sent real-estate prices skyward and produced a certain feverish scramble for plots to build (mostly "luxury") residential and commercial real-estate.<sup>35</sup> Prices in the high-end sector varied at that point between US\$3,000 and US\$10,000 per m<sup>2</sup> (Krijnen & Fawaz 2010: 117). One would thus expect developers to capitalize on these plots on such a prime location. In fact,

34 To give an indication, according to a recent study by (the Lebanese) Bank Audi, real-estate sales in December 2009 were up over 40% compared to the same month in the preceding year (to \$1.25 billion) (cited in Wierzborski 2010: 10). Beginning in the 1990s, successive governments have made real-estate into one of the key economic sectors in Lebanon, through (tax) subsidies and measures that increase the leeway of developers. In the 2000s, a number of further factors coalesced to produce a major real-estate boom – among them, the shift of a portion from the investment in economically unstable Gulf countries into Lebanon, and particularly a change in national policy for the Lebanese banking sector – endowed with large surpluses – that necessitated them to seek new venues of investments.

35 See Krijnen and Fawaz (2010) and Wierzborski (2010) for insight into the production of the high-end sector (both the kind of products and the institutional framework and politics behind their production).

the 'limbo' was somewhat deceptive, because acquisitions had been taking place since 2004. Records I obtained from the national registry show that indeed properties were sold, and mostly to one buyer who is identified, at least in a few newspaper articles that I was able to dig up, as a 'Syrian businessman' with connections to Hariri circles. The businessman used a number of daughter companies – registered to members of his extended family – to buy up different plots, mostly likely to make it seem different buyers were active in the area (in other ways as well, dissimulation seemed part of the business model). A business partner and son-in-law I contacted over the phone declined any other comment than that for the moment the market wasn't ready for their plans.

Residents' were aware that things were happening, but they occupied a disadvantaged place in this 'knowledge economy'. Their speculations generally revolved around the notion of "Solidere II", mentioned above. According to this understanding, Solidere itself, or at least people in Solidere, would be responsible for the imminent redevelopment of the area. Indeed there do appear to be some connections – given the businessman's apparent proximity to the Hariri family, and that the partner I spoke to had previously contracted for one of the most prestigious office buildings in Solidere. Yet, none of the residents seemed to possess any detailed knowledge such as this, except for one, a successful local businessman, who was able to tell me this one character was 'buying up all the lands and then closing them' (i.e. building walls or fences around the perimeters of the plots [see picture on page 58]) – information he acquired during a business lunch.

The combination of, first, the 'removal' of Shia inhabitants from the old Christian area and, second, the rumours about the investors and their intentions that are about to 'take over' the area contribute to a generally shared discourse of an embattled neighbourhood. These tie into discourses of the territorial city that circulate more widely in the city. Hariri's party, the Future Movement, would, according to such rumours, buy up as much land as possible in order to secure the city for the Sunna. He would have his allies, and the name of Saudi Prince and Supreme Investor Waleed bin Talal has been designated as the man behind impending take-overs from the far southern suburbs to Khandaq al-Ghamiq. In the latter case, his name is sometimes tied to the "Solidere II" project. The threat of that project, as perceived by some, is sectarian (against us Shia), class-based (against us poor) and against residents in general ("they only build offices nowadays"). In the first vein, the local Hizbullah representative mentioned earlier assured me that indeed Hariri & Co. have set their eyes on Khandaq for a long time, at least since 1990, wanting to clear the



"Closed off" plots in the old Christian Neighbourhood.

Shia from the area between Downtown all the way to Ras al-Nabaa (a neighbourhood to the southeast of Khandaq).<sup>36</sup> Fortunately, he added, Hizbullah prevented that project from ever happening, by buying the lands<sup>37</sup>.

However, their political leadership appears to have taken a different stance. This points to the transformation in the political (playing) field since the civil war. While on-the-ground confrontation and control over territories was a central strategy to effectuate desired political outcomes during the war (whether that be the accomplishment of demographic changes in these territories or reform in the political and state system), as soon as weapons were no longer an accepted recourse, territorial control had to be evaluated against what could be attained through state and government. Thus, while certain territories were still defended, as we have seen in the previous chapter, other territories were given up in subservience to new political realities. The Shia parties allowed the claim

36 Such projected developments do not connote a negative image for everyone. For some, a minority to my sense, impending developments are not a 'hostile take-over' but a welcome sanitization of the neighbourhood of its 'dirty' elements – the poor, the squatters, the criminals. A 'Solidere II' would spread class and order, and clear away the dirt and unsightliness, illegality and the (petty) criminality of troubled youth.

37 I was not able to find any evidence to that extent.

over downtown by the Hariri people, in large part because there was simply no space for the 'rights' of displaced people in public discourse and to insist upon the existence of such rights through military imposition was no longer an option. Thus smooth evacuation of refugees became a bargaining chip for the exchanging. We must see the deal for the displaced of Khandaq in a similar light. The competition by Druze, Christian and Sunni powers over the Ministry's cash and political direction made blocking a resolution of their fate relatively cost-free. After 2000, when Hariri regained his grip over government and the Ministry in particular a number of things changed vis-à-vis the preceding decade. The Ministry itself was able to carry out some of its work in Khandaq, at a slow because poorly financed pace, in the eye of the storm of more politically charged 'files' (such as conflict claims between Christians and Druze in a number of Chouf mountain villages). Also, a new understanding developed between Hariri and Hizbullah's leadership (Hasan Nasrallah in particular). (Please note that for the following, I have no basis more reliable than my own meandering conversations with a few informants who, while generally well versed in the arts of political commentatorship, have no first-hand experience of these matters.) In terms of larger political issues, Hizbullah agreed to leave economic policy to Hariri's people – during the 1990s the party had positioned itself as the champion of socio-economic rights a number of times. In return, Hariri agreed to not meddle with Hizbullah's resistance activities – the latter's increasing military capabilities had become cause for concern with other political groupings. The gentleman's agreement assured each side what was most precious to it. As a corollary, however, both parties also agreed on Hariri's claim to municipal Beirut and Hizbullah's claim over the southern suburbs. Hariri's pretension to the throne of the new Sunni za'im of Beirut was indubitable and widely recognized, while we have already seen how Hizbullah has defended its right to administer the affairs of the suburbs. The fact finally that, given the Lebanese post-war political imagination ('return to normal'), the status quo of the refugees became increasingly indefeasible a decade after the end of the war, will also have contributed to the ultimate resolution of the Khandaq files.

The transformation of the political playing field and thus of territoriality as a political logic therefore has to be seen firstly within the aforementioned differentiated understanding of 'territoriality' and, secondly, within the context in which any kind of territorial strategy may or may not be felicitous. In this particular context, the 'territorial' defence of a (demographic) presence was given up, even if the territorial consolidation of relations with the constituency was maintained, as will become clear in

the following chapters, within *the heart* of the neighbourhood. That leaves two questions: as we move into that heart, i.e., the lived and lively section of the neighbourhood, do political actors intervene in the production of space as they have done in the housing of displaced persons and in the reconstruction projects? And what of a territorialized political imagination by the residents? Do we see a similar politicization of the identity of urban space? In the case of the old Christian neighbourhood, it is clear that both insecurity and uncertainty form the backdrop to this speculative type of territorial imagination. Discussing the residential state of things in the heart of Khandaq should provide a good point to start addressing these questions.

**Coping with residential insecurity** Residents' sense of 'embattlement' is on the one hand but one manifestation of a more widely shared 'territorial lesson' (Sarkis 1993) that Beirutis learned during the civil war: the city is rife with rumours about sectarian competition over 'our' and 'their' space. But, on the other hand, there is also a – somewhat less pronounced – class dimension to that sense – that it is the poor that consistently draw the short end of the stick in this city (and this country). “Solidere” (II) allows for both forms of critique – at least for the working-class Shia in the neighbourhood: it's a Sunni take-over of the city and it's only for the rich. That latter part is actually shared across the social and sectarian board – or at least among working and middle classes. 'Before (the war)', so the complaint goes, 'there was a place for the lower, the middle *and* higher classes in the city centre. Now it's only for the higher classes'.<sup>38</sup> This notion draws on the debates about the reconstruction (of the downtown area) and the widely shared idea that the new city centre was to 'heal the wounds of the war' and become the oecumenical heart of the nation (cf. Chapter 1). As it transpired, however, people will observe, the current centre caters primarily to tourism, high-class entertainment and 'luxury living'. Yet, the discourse is also in part rooted in real experiences of the increasing cost of living. While the metropolitan area of Beirut has grown and is growing, the population of municipal Beirut has likely actually gone down (at least according to a tabulation by Charbel Nahas<sup>39</sup>. Beirut has become increasingly unaffordable for a large section of the population, over the course of the last decade especially, and specu-

38 Sometimes, the argument is then extrapolated to cover the entire country.

39 In a 'Le développement équilibré' (2002: 7) accessed 2015-09-02 at: [http://www.charbelnahas.org/textes/Amenagement\\_et\\_urbanisme/Caract%E9risation\\_des\\_r%F4les\\_jou%E9s\\_par\\_la\\_RMB.pdf](http://www.charbelnahas.org/textes/Amenagement_et_urbanisme/Caract%E9risation_des_r%F4les_jou%E9s_par_la_RMB.pdf).

larly so since 2006.<sup>40</sup> The only affordable spaces can therefore be found further and further out of the city. Many people in Khandaq and across the city – virtually all those who have not bought property for themselves or for their children – are therefore in a precarious position on the real-estate market and worry about maintaining their place in the neighbourhood and the city at large.

In this second half of the chapter, I discuss changing residential conditions in Khandaq by going into both the histories and experiences of residents as well as into the work of developers of ‘low-end’ construction projects. I start out with a few sketches of residents’ histories that should give an indication of what the housing market looks like at the lower end. I paint a picture of the various kinds of positions that neighbourhood inhabitants take up in the housing market, such as long term residents, parents who look to the housing needs of their offspring, young families, former refugees. All relate differently to the challenges of the current market. Then I move on to the locally active developers and their impact on the area. Together, residents’ experiences and developers’ activities allow me to move into a discussion of the politics of territory and the territorialization of the political imagination.

Abu Rabih (aged about 70) is a long-term resident of the area. A small and lean man, he still works in his small carpenter’s shop, at a retired man’s pace. On the street, visiting his carpenter neighbours, he presented an amiable and calm face, with a chuckle always at the ready. He was born in the south, but his father died early and so they were forced to go Beirut to find work. They settled in Zoqaq al-Blat, the neighbourhood to the west of Khandaq. His younger brother worked at a butcher’s shop and Abu Rabih worked with him for a while, but he didn’t like the smell. He worked in a sweets store for a while but didn’t like that either. He then went to work with his uncle in carpentry. This is where he found his profession. In his apprentice years he alternated between an Armenian carpenter and his uncle, but after eight years the opportunity came up to take over a carpenter’s shop in Khandaq, when its previous occupant had died and his son didn’t want it. Khandaq al-Ghamiq street was (and to a modest extent still is) a centre for carpentry in the city – with a number of carpenters housed next to each other. Abu Rabih had been in his shop then since 1963. He paid a yearly rent of 2.100.000LL (\$1400). His younger brother left Beirut, dividing his time between Saudi Arabia and the South. His older brother did

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40 Nahas later compared Beirut with Lyon and Marseilles, finding that while the minimum wage is at 25% of what it is in France, the average price per square meter is at 123% (Al-Akhbar, 2014-02-14, Wehbe).



some odd things, including working as a taxi driver, but died young. So he and his mother then moved to Khandaq together, just in front of the shop, in a building that dates back to the late 1930s. At first they rented, but the owner, a wealthy man who was linked to the port and had several buildings, both in Khandaq and the rest of Beirut, wanted to leave the country and sold his properties. He sold Abu Rabih's building to two investor-partners, who proceeded to sell the individual apartments. This was all at the very tail end of the war, the situation was still not quite settled down, so prices were low. Abu Rabih took the offer and bought the apartment at \$5,000. (Many bought it then with him. Others bought only the following year, for \$15,000, then some still the next year for \$25,000. The steep rise in prices reflected the crystallization of the situation in the country – the war was really over this time – and the beginnings of the post-war real-estate boom.)

At the time Abu Rabih did not have the \$5,000, so he borrowed the money from various family members. It took him 10 years to repay – whenever he had money he would pay, whenever he didn't, he didn't. He would never consider going to a bank. *They're criminals (ḥaramiyya). They take interest so you pay double the price and when you don't pay, they take your house! And not just in Lebanon. In the entire world. See what's happening in the US. They foreclosed on this 60 years old man (sakkaru haqqo). And the state isn't defending its citizens. In fact, at least in Lebanon, it's making it worse. It puts taxes on everything except on the rich: when you smoke, pay for fuel, the electricity – all taxes!* His generalized mistrust of institutions and other actors that detain money and information also came out of his experience of trying to go through a middleman – a *simsar* – in order to find a house for a friend. In principle, *simsars* are officially registered individuals, whose business are (lightly) regulated through the state (though the word also covers a culturally recognized position that anyone could theoretically take up in any given time or domain). But the dealings he had with the man had been quite a disappointment. *They are criminals just as much – he takes [a commission] from the one and from the other [side]!* So he told his friend to take care of it himself. His conclusion: *al-tājir w-al-fājir waḥad* – the merchant and the reprobate are one and the same.

A frequent conversation partner for Abu Rabih is Abu Mahmoud. Abu Mahmoud is a taxi driver, roughly of the same age as Abu Rabih, and only worked on call, so he often had quite a bit of time to spend in between rides. Abu Mahmoud also came to Beirut as a young boy, when he was about five years old. His father had a job in the *souqs* – you know, down in Solidere<sup>41</sup>, he indicates, pointing toward downtown – but he died when he was still young.

41 A vernacular name for the city centre. A related note on indexicals: one goes 'down' to the city centre. One goes 'up' to the suburbs, or the village in the mountains.



Also, like Abu Rabih, he stayed with his mother in the house they had rented, while all his brothers and sisters went elsewhere, the latter to Australia. His sons and daughters have gone in the meanwhile as well; his two sons have been living in Zambia for the past 15 years. His house belonged to the sister of the well-known mukhtar Makki. Makki recently sold the plot, in name of the family's heirs. When parents bequeath real-estate to the next generation, custom has it that it is sub-divided into (gender unequal) shares among the sons and daughters. If this process is not handled properly, for instance when the inheritors have no (usufructuary) interest in the real-estate anymore, the number of property holders soon reaches unmanageable quantities. This was also the case of the Makki family and so mukhtar Makki, most intimately familiar with the area and with a large network, was charged to negotiate a sale. The building was then sold to one of the 'Syrian businessman's' subsidiary companies, registered in – and bearing – his daughter's name. The rent for the apartment was fixed in 1965 and now amounts to some \$80 per month, an amount that he now paid to the company. However, he knows very well that the company did not buy the plot to collect his meagre rent. At some point, they will start the procedures to evict him and his wife. But he hadn't heard from the company at all so far, so he waits.

In the meanwhile, Abu Rabih's oldest son – Rabih – will one day inherit the apartment. There weren't too many alternatives for him. He had a steady job, working back-office in Hamra, and he sometimes helped out with the Saleh brothers, who operate one of largest newspaper and magazine distribution companies in the country, up the street from the mosque next to his house. None of this would be sufficient however to buy a house in today's market conditions. This meant that his life was partly on hold. It is quite difficult to marry, for instance, unless you can 'open a house' – start a family in a new home (a common problem across the region [and beyond], see e.g. Koning 2009 and Singerman 1995 for two case-studies from Cairo). The forbidding prices in the housing market were therefore taken quite seriously. Abu Hasan, a semi-retired carpenter some 50 meter up the street, who still traded in used wood and occasionally carried out a job in his neighbour's workshop, even saw cause for revolution in today's youth's insecurity. *This country is ruled by greedy bosses, who suck as much out of the state for their own profit, rather than work for the interest of the people. In the meanwhile, there are no decent jobs for my son. So he can't afford a house. And if he can't afford a house, he can't marry. In such conditions, what's my son to stop from revolting?*<sup>42</sup> *It would only be what these profiteering political criminals would have coming to them...*

42 His son actually managed to find a half-decent job – by Lebanese standards – soon after, working for one of the region's largest supermarket chains. He showed no inclination to revolt.

Ayoub's story allows us to examine such parental worries from a bit closer. Ayoub is a retired officer from the internal security forces. His apartment, just up from the mosque, is in the same street as Saleh's distribution company. The building dates back to 1970 or '71. It consists mostly of studios and 1 and 2 bedroom apartments. Ayoub however had managed to accumulate apartments on his floor and rebuild them into something of a penthouse. He was quite happy where he was – but the experiences of his children perhaps illustrate more precisely the difficulties of entering the housing market. His daughter 'sits' at home – she went to university, but it's difficult to find work, though it's not as if there's too much pressure. She basically lives off his pension, which amounts to, if I remembered correctly, \$1200. *Getting married would be the next logical step, according to Ayoub, but that's quite difficult. It's even the greatest challenge, nowadays. It's difficult finding a house or pay for rent, so people simply don't get married. So that's why the guys go abroad to work. Sometimes the girl's parents are rich and they buy a house for her, in which case the guy doesn't have to.* In general it's expected of the man's side to provide the material conditions for matrimonial life. It thus occurs frequently that parents invest in their son's future (usually the son, given scarce resources) by 'reserving' housing for them. Ayoub is not of those means however, so his children were on their own. For example, his oldest son had a 110m<sup>2</sup> apartment in Choueifat, one of the (far) southern suburbs, which he bought in 2003 for \$45,000, with a loan of \$200/month, a loan that amounts in the end to \$25,000 interest paid. That apartment was then worth 150,000\$ (at least, his brother considered buying an apartment in the same ("ancient") building that went for that price – but it needed renovation for another \$25,000, which was too much to cough up). *If you want to buy an apartment like that in Khandaq then you spend some \$350,000. And the bank doesn't serve you at all anymore. "Special offers", sure. You take out a \$100,000 loan and you wind up paying \$200,000 in instalments. Great 'special' offer.*

Subhi was the head of one of these young families that were struggling to secure a stable spot in the housing market. He lived in 'the Khatib building'. The Khatib building is a rather famous or infamous building in the area. It is one of three buildings that were developed on the eve of the 1975 war by a number of developers, one of whom, a Syrian, goes by the name Khatib. In contrast to the other buildings in the project, 'the' Khatib building was never finished before the war started. During the war it was squatted and residents sort of finished it by themselves, adding balcony walls and one or two floors. The resulting façade is most likely not what Khatib & Co. had had in mind (see pictures above). The refugees were then evicted in 1998 and the apartment entrances were walled up.



The "Khatib building".



However, during the July war of 2006, many inhabitants of the southern suburbs, heavily bombed by Israel, came fleeing to Beirut. They 'opened' the closed apartments. While most of them returned relatively soon after, many others moved in, now that the seals of the law had been torn down. Subhi was initially not one of them. After going through a whole list of places that he had lived in since he got married (to a girl from Khandaq), for periods of 1 to 3 years, most of which in the southern suburbs, he explained how he got into the Khatib building. First, a close friend of his wasn't able to afford to pay the (\$200) rent for his Khatib apartment anymore and, together with wife and kids, moved back in with his parents. He had suggested to Subhi that he take over the apartment from him, because Subhi had been on the lookout again around that time. After about half a year in that apartment however, Subhi received word that another resident of the building was ready to move out and that he was willing to sell his apartment – i.e., not the apartment itself, which he didn't own, but everything that he had done to renovate the place, "with tiles and all" – for the sum of \$3,000. That was a big sum for Subhi to pay at once, who was making about \$900/month at the time. But he said that he had \$2,000 saved up and he borrowed \$1,000 from work, for which a certain percentage would be kept out of his monthly pay check. Thus it happened that he got into a decent squat for \$3,000. "It was a risk", as he explains, "because you don't know when the story might end – the police could come tomorrow and kick you out". But so far it has paid off. "I've been there for a year and a half now, which in rent would have cost me more than that. But I have to be prepared for when I'll have to leave". So he's saving money again. Because these days people expect you to pay upfront for a year, half a year at least. So every month he puts away \$300.

His uncertain future, the expectation that someday they will come and kick him out is tied of course to the fact that he lives in an apartment he does not own. "There's no owner. Nobody knows whose place this is. Maybe it belongs to the owner of the building, maybe it's the Syrian owner, the one in Syria, maybe the owner is out of the country [*msāfir*], nobody knows. I paid the guy who had taken it and fixed it up." But the worry is more general than that. I've heard various people express their anxiety about the future of the building. At a certain time there were rumours that the whole plot had been bought and were certainly to be replaced by offices. Subhi was also among those expressing such fears. The rumour-like quality of such speculations is essential, I think. It reflects the disadvantaged position of people like Subhi, which is not merely one of structural insecurity and generalized anxiety, but also one of a lack of access to relevant information. That would account for contrasting bits of information that I found surprising at time, like when I was told by one of the inhabitants of "the Kurdish building" – also developed by Khatib & Co. – that the absent Khatib was not that absent at all, that he was in fact, in contact with him. More substantially, one of the new mukhtars in 2010 opened his office in that building – hardly a sign that the legal status is not in order, or that the building will be torn down.

I have heard many stories like Subhi's. As mentioned earlier, if you are not already in possession of an apartment – like Abu Rabiḥ, or Ayoub – your hold onto a residence or even a neighbourhood is precarious. Also regular tenants have to prepare for displacement. The reason for this is the rental law, which received a serious overhaul in 1992 in order to address the problems of fixed rents. Over the decades and especially over the course of war, in which inflation was rampant, the rents had come to dramatically lag behind the value of the building and the costs of its maintenance. In 1992, the 'solution' was to introduce limited-term rental contracts for all new leases, while leaving the fixed rental contracts untouched (which subsequently became known as 'old rents'). The term was set for 3 years. At the end of the three years, a new contract has to be signed – and negotiated. In times of rapidly rising prices, as with a real-estate boom, an individual owner would be inclined not to 'lose out' relative to the market. That can mean significant price hikes. Thus, one family, who rented a 1 bedroom apartment in somewhat run-down building from the 1970s, paid \$300 a month – an amount that at the time of speaking, was already below market level, even in relatively cheap Khandaq. The father thus feared that any price hike (\$400, \$450) would mean he would have to leave, with his \$500/month salary.

Illegality in such cases is a double-edged sword. It may bring relief or

even security relative to the prevailing situation, but (nearly) always a temporally limited one. Consider Abu Kassem's story. He was born in Aicha Bakkar, a neighbourhood in the centre of West Beirut. He moved once or twice and wound up in Nabaa, the Muslim (Shia) working-class suburb in East Beirut. He found a job however in Khandaq, making (leather) bags. When the war started and he was evicted from Nabaa he moved to Khandaq and squatted an old, white, two-storey building, directly up the street from the Christian neighbourhood (next to Abu Fadi's art nouveau building, if you'll recall). The leather business hadn't survived the war, so he moved to the tire business with a shop in the Christian neighbourhood. In 2001 however, the house he lived in was taken down to make room for a new apartment building. Its developers anticipated an upsurge in the neighbourhood, once the Solidere II project would be implemented. The investors applied for eviction with the Ministry for the Displaced and Abu Kassem reported he received \$15,000 in compensation for his departure. In 2004, he also lost the tire business when the whole Christian area was evacuated – without getting any compensation this time. After his eviction, he moved in with his daughter, who lived in another old, somewhat decrepit building, just off the street that is the unofficial domain of the Haidar family. One of the Haidars is Abu Zalem (a war moniker that translates as Father of Darkness), the former Iraqi Baath commander and current Hizbullah rep. I briefly mentioned him above, as the one who was able to find Nawwar housing in an empty building he managed. There are two such buildings on that street. Their owners had already left in 1973, because the municipality had been planning to widen the street and had expropriated the properties along one side. The project never materialized however, most likely because it was part of a package of plans that also would have affected the Bachoura cemetery, which is managed by powerful people in the Sunni community. The plans still exists, on paper, and could therefore be resurrected, but it is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Hypothetically, it could be taken out of the drawer in order to provide infrastructural support to whatever major project will arise in the northern quadrants of the neighbourhood. Abu Zalem however is adamant: *forget about it* – that project's not going to happen anymore. The story shows how seeking refuge (almost literally) in the extra-legal order can be the better and sometimes only solution at a given time, just like in the case of Subhi, who has been able to live more cheaply because occupation of apartments is not strictly monitored, but who lives in anxiety about when this might – abruptly – end. Abu Kassem found refuge in the house left behind by other refugees, but then had to leave when others made claim on the property. He now seems relatively

secure in another abandoned building, but when a third party comes to claim *that* property, again he will have no legal grounds to stand on.

The generalized insecurity would be a basis for politicization here, an identification of an 'us' and 'them'. That came out for instance in the way Subhi and his friends talked about the Khatib building, a 'they' who would come and tear it down and 'replace it with offices'. But who would be the 'they' though? To answer that question we need to go back to the politics of the production of space. The first step is to go into who's doing the producing, the subsequent step to ask how that factors into people's sense of the political.

### **Small-time entrepreneurs and the production of "middle class" space**

While I have highlighted the worries about 'where the city is going' as lived through a few people's biographies, land prices, rent levels and real-estate development are actually frequently recurring topics of conversation among nearly all Khandaq residents I have come to know. As we've seen, the northern section of the neighbourhood is exceptional in Beirut because of its lag in development. In the densely inhabited core of the neighbourhood, there is also a lag vis-à-vis its municipal context, but it takes a different shape. While the architectural fabric of the old Christian neighbourhood, its property politics and structure, and the subsequent large relative disinvestments set up a number of conditions for a radical reorientation of the function and outlook of the area, in the core of Khandaq, the contrast between current and potential value is smaller. It is relatively densely built, which precludes the implementation of large projects, and the rather dilapidated feel (a combination of a poorly maintained old urban fabric and buildings like the Khatib building, hastily and cheaply developed immediately preceding or during the war) also decreases the overall value of the area. The vibrant working-class street life, with its corner boys, will also constitute an impediment (at least for developers of 'high-end' properties). As a consequence, projects were more modest in scale (and hence with smaller absolute profit margins) and the rates per m<sup>2</sup> were closer to those of the far southern suburbs than of the surrounding city.

This does not mean however that there has been no activity. On the contrary, for such a relatively small area, there has been quite a bit of development. Because there have been no empty plots – except for the strip of land along the Green Line – the new developments 'feed' on the older built environment, which has lost its profitability vis-à-vis new developments. Buildings from 1960s and earlier have diminished resilience in the face of urban change, because they tend to be smaller (especially for

buildings of up until the 1940s) and because they generally house people on those 'old rents'. For both reasons, they yield relatively little money. In the case of Khandaq, we can identify three rough stages of this kind of development that displaces older buildings. The relatively unpretentious and bare 6-9 floor apartment towers of the 1980s, built in a time of great demographic pressure on the city; then the slightly higher towers of the first half of the 1990s, with more attention to finishing and more "class"; and finally the second half of the first decade of this century, with edifices yet a floor or two higher, as allowed under the new building law, mostly developed according the currently reigning 'Gulf' model for residential towers. For each new tower, a two to five story building, with small street-level businesses and a few families living above, will have had to make way.

My discussion concerns protagonists active in the last building phase, their financial, commercial and design practices and the impact of their work on the neighbourhood 'ecology'. Let's start off with the scale of investments. As one developer, who oversees a project in the very middle of the neighbourhood, explained: "This is no place for a super deluxe building. The value of the project simply depends on the area. For our project, for instance, we sell at about \$1,600 to \$1,700 per m<sup>2</sup>. Just a street and a block away," he gestures in the direction of another recent project, on the south-western corner of Khandaq, overlooking the Bachoura cemetery and a small municipal park,

"the developer sold at \$2,000 to \$2,200. Then, if you go towards the Ministry of Finance [on Bechara al-Khoury street, on the old Green Line], you have this large plot where they're digging right? \$3,500 per m<sup>2</sup>. It's really close, but it's because we're in the middle of the neighbourhood. You've seen it. People who would be able to afford a super deluxe building wouldn't want to live here, and people who would want to live here wouldn't be able to afford [that kind of class]". (Interview Moussa's son, February 2012)

So instead, they built a 'middle class' building (see pictures on page 70). That means lower quality of the materials used for finishings, and smaller apartments.

The fact that the developments are relatively modest (instead of 'super deluxe' projects) means that a certain kind of developer is attracted to





Moussa's "middle-class building". On the right, evidence of the accident that caused half of the road to collapse.

these opportunities. The projects are initiated and executed by relatively small players, with limited financial resources at their disposal. This favours various kinds of constellations of cooperation in which resources are pooled by several players in order to make a project realizable. A common form this takes is a contract between a landowner, who has land but no money to develop it, and a contractor or developer, who has the experience and network, and sometimes money, to erect a building, but not enough money to buy the land to do it on. In such a case, the two sides pool their respective resources and in the end their transaction is not monetary but material. The contractor develops the land – in exchange for the land, he gives, typically, half the finished building to the landowner, who can then hand over the apartments (usually on each even or uneven floor) to whomever bought it from him. These are somewhat unstable commercial relationships; because of the unpredictability of the real-estate sector and market, sometimes the developer gets into trouble, incur higher costs and then demands a larger share of the building. Although in principle, their contracts are registered and notarized with the court, some horror stories about breakdowns do circulate. (Both the incidents themselves and the stories that circulate about them tell us something about the kinds of protagonists we are dealing with and the somewhat ad-hoc nature of their work.) A variation of this kind of partnership is that vari-



ous developers enter into a project as partners, combining their financial resources to buy a piece of property, construct a building, and then dividing the apartments, according to the financial weight each of the partners has put in.

These commercial partnerships do not imply that afterwards the developers are flush with funds. Typically, they do not have enough money to carry out the entire construction and at times they do not even enough to make a serious beginning. Therefore, they need additional financing strategies. One strategy is to go to a bank for a loan. This is not a favourite option, but it does happen<sup>43</sup>. One of the developers I spoke to, Samaha, also sought recourse to the bank. Together with two partners, he had bought the plot Abu Kassem lived on since he was displaced from East Beirut. He had financed himself three earlier buildings he built up in the mountains, but this time, the plot cost them a million dollars and then his money was largely gone. Yet it would take another \$2m to complete the construction. So he went to the bank and took out a loan, though now he wished he never did and never will again. The problem with loans, Samaha explained, is that the bank then owns whatever you gave as collateral and so if you're not fast enough, they can take away your investment. And it didn't go fast enough, there was quite a bit of delay with the eviction of the refugees living in the old house. When they could finally start, he was therefore in something of a rush to finish the building. Because the refugees in the wider surrounding area also had not been evicted as promised earlier (1999-2000), the value of the building, once finished, was also not what he had expected. But he sold at the going price, and though he notes with some bitterness the enormous flight of prices had since taken (from his own \$600 to \$2,000/m<sup>2</sup> now), he was still glad he sold when he did. If not, it would only have been the bank that would have profited. This story – and its moral – resonates with a widely shared antipathy towards and mistrust of the banking sector<sup>44</sup>.

Instead of financing their projects through loans, developers prefer “co-financing”, by “friends”, as Samaha liked to call them. This is otherwise known as ‘buying off the map’. In this case, customers ‘buy’ the apartment with an initial down payment and usually subsequent instalments. When

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43 Though it happens primarily with the bigger players, cf. Credit Libanais, ‘The Lebanese Real-Estate Sector’, October 2008.

44 As to the banks themselves, they have not had to depend on private sector loans to make money. They make more and more securely lending to the state. Also, given the relatively large degree of non-professional involvement in the real-estate sectors, and given the instability in the region, it is perhaps not entirely unreasonable to set high rents for loans. (Aveline [2000: 26] also mentions that regulation by the Central Bank makes it hard for private banks to invest long-term.)

the building is finished, the customer pays the last instalment and is handed the property deeds, which up until that point had remained in the developer's or landowner's hands. The customer thus provides the capital for the construction. There are a few variations in this scheme, mostly depending on the situation of the developer. In the case of Moussa, the developer of the 'middle class' building, he was out of funds as well, and went looking for a few customers who – for a discount on the total price – would be able to both make a substantial initial down payment as well as continue to pay serious instalments, so that by the time the construction was finished, the total price for the apartment would also be paid for. The instalments thus finance each step of the way.<sup>45</sup> As to the customer, there are two reasons, but only one cause, for buying early (rather than waiting to see the product): steeply rising prices. Over the course of the roughly two years of construction, the apartment will have become substantially more expensive. This is a strong incentive for a family wishing to live in that building or vicinity to buy in early. It is also a wonderful opportunity for a speculator, whose profit is made up off the difference between the price 'off the map' and the price 'on delivery'. This investor-buyer has become an omnipresent phenomenon and all developers I've spoken to have had such customers. The boom – and its promise of short-term profit – therefore appears to function as the very condition of possibility for the work of these relatively small players.

Should the funds of a project still run dry, usually the project is just put on hold. This happened in at least two cases in Khandaq – the contractor who converted an old office building to apartments for his children (see the first half of this chapter) and a retired lawyer who was adamant that no one else get involved in the renovation of the 1954 building his father had had built, despite his uneven access to funds (see picture on next page). Such interruptions are also the consequence of not taking out loans – if no other actors have invested in the project and thus a say over what happens, then a developer can stall indefinitely. Aveline (2000), in her descriptions of the real-estate and construction market during the boom of the early 1990s, which was characterized by 'a good amount of ama-

45 However, it also happens, though Moussa wanted none of that, that after the down payment, the (monthly) instalments are relatively low or absent all together. This would be a typical case of an 'investor' (in Moussa's world, more of a profiteer), who buys the apartment of the map only to resell directly, once he has the property deeds. Because of the boom and its rapidly rising prices, this is easy money (and a practice that itself contributes to the boom). Not all have the kind of pocket money to buy an extra apartment, but, again, depending on the developer's own financial largesse, at times they are allowed to pay only the down payment and a bit. At the end of the construction, they take out a loan from the bank to cover the remaining sum, sell the apartment, pay back the loan and deposit the rest as profit.



The now renovated building Najjar inherited from his father. Behind is Samaha's 2002 construction (pink to match with the faux traditional esthetic of Downtown's "Saifi Village").

teurism' (Fawaz: pers. comm), also notes such phenomena, particularly by people venturing into construction more as a side-project. Thus they would have above-market expectations of the price they could ask and stay there and not come down because there was no immediate financial pressure. If they ran out of money during the construction, they might engage in barter with fellow developers.

From my observations, it seems the latest boom has enabled a similar type of 'amateurism'. At the very least, it appears to be a topic of discussion within the field. Here is an example from an 'insider' (a 'professional', that is). I sat down with the main supervisor of the luxurious residential tower in the old Christian neighbourhood – an engineer – and the son of one of the owners – son of an engineer, and himself recently graduated in architecture, and they explained what was wrong with so many construction projects "nowadays". To them the worst case scenario is when someone, typically someone who's made money abroad and comes back home to invest his money, attracts an engineer to do the design and feasibility studies and then goes and "sits down at the site", and supervises the construction himself. "Why, just the other day, I saw someone, reading a book "How to Build"!" Then you have owners who do hire and retain the engineer, but – simply because he has the money – forces his ideas on the engineer. "He doesn't want this wall, doesn't want that pillar. 'It's my money, so I decide'. You know, there's something called *study*, there's

something called *respect*<sup>46</sup>". The main engineer reserved a special resentment for lawyers turned owner-supervisors. Despite clearly not knowing what he's doing, the lawyer "doesn't care about whether it's right – and he gets away with it, because he's a lawyer and a lawyer moulds [*byifab-brik*] the law however he wants to, so it's still 100% legal, he has no problems".

While there is a good measure of distinction practices in the quotes above – and a general sense of a country wrecked by 'those' liars, such as lawyers<sup>47</sup> – the developers I talked to in Khandaq often were indeed people with relatively little experience – if not with construction in general, then at least with running one's own project. At times this led to mistakes and setbacks that could probably have been avoided otherwise. Take Moussa's case. He came from a poor family, and starting working young in the printing business. When he had the chance to get a job in Saudi Arabia, he took it. There he worked himself up with various jobs and made good money. But it wasn't a life, so after 26 years he came back and wanted to invest his fortunes in something. The only business he knows – printing – was not open to him, having been away so long a time. Real-estate was the only other option. The project in Khandaq is his second – his first had been a tough experience though, because his partner had turned out to be a crook, who had embezzled money from powerful people. These powerful people then came after the man and his properties – including the development he and Moussa were collaborating on. Though he managed to finish the project alone, the experience was not encouraging.

This second project came to him through a distant relative, an engineer. He had heard word of a plot in the middle of Khandaq that had been besieged by its own measure of deception and bad judgement. The owners of the plot had wanted to collaborate with a developer, according to the principle of a 50-50 or 60-40 division of the final product. However, when they had gathered the initial down payments, the developer vanished with the money. Afterwards, the family no longer wanted part of any such deal and just wanted to sell the land. Moussa asked no questions and bought it. He quickly ran into trouble himself. The engineer and relative wanted money for his mediation of the plot – a *simisar*'s fee. Itself not a problem, but he wanted the full 2,5% that an official, registered *simisar* gets – "who pays taxes over it". Moussa refused and wound up

46 Italics are English in original.

47 A sense explicated by an all-out lament about the state of the nation that directly followed the last comment.

going to court over it (where he won). Before that however, Moussa had already given the engineer the job of doing a feasibility study – because he was family after all. This turned out to be a mistake, because quickly after starting they realized that the study had been done wrong. They had to hire another, very expensive, engineer to advise on, again very expensive, damage control measures. Then, when they were digging the double basement for the car park, they reached below the level of the foundation of the old house that had been there. Was that going to be a problem?, they asked their engineer. The latter counselled them to move on without further precautions. As a result the basement wall collapsed – and half of the adjoining road with it. In these live-and-learn practices, as well as in the assortment of financial strategies, we can discern a certain *bricolage*<sup>48</sup> in these entrepreneurs' mode of operation.

Finally a few words on their relation to the housing market. How do the developers find their customers and vice versa? The network is among the most important sources of interest for their products. The bank-averse developer was quite explicit about it. "How you can sell your apartments depends on a few things. One is the standard of living you are selling and your contacts to the people [to whom] you present [the offer]. I can't sell to people who buy for 1,000,000, because I don't know them. But I know people who can buy for 200,000. So I build for this standard – so I can sell it". Now that he has completed a few projects he has extended his network as well. He claims that former customers regularly inquire with him if he's planning anything new, in which case they would want to buy off the map and re-sell upon delivery. In general, to strategically put the word out suffices for it to get around. If the network does not provide enough contacts, then a second option is to go to the real-estate broker, the *simsar*. These are generally not agencies (though these exist as well), but (mostly) local individuals who know their neighbourhood and who are known by its inhabitants. As we've seen, there are costs attached to this move, so the developer must feel there are no other, sufficient, options. Samaha for instance, despite his network, also used a few *simsars*, because he was under pressure by his loan to sell quickly. Only one of my interviewees placed an ad. There is a last strategy, however, which is to do nothing and simply rely on the initiative of the customer. All four developers who built within the core of the neighbourhood I talked to

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48 Levi-Strauss' opposition between the *bricoleur* and the "engineer": the engineer creates specialized tools for specialized purposes. The *bricoleur* is a "jack-of-all-trades", who uses few, non-specialized tools for a wide variety of purposes, making and mending things from bits and pieces generally available or from previous jobs.



The tower overlooking the Bachoura cemetery (located behind the white-green building).

told me they had found buyers because they stepped up to him, having seen his construction site. The developer of the apartment tower on the corner of the Bachoura cemetery (see pictures on page 76) claimed he found nearly all of this customers in that way. About half of the people who bought from Moussa came up to him after he had started building. A third developer, of the most recent building, hadn't sold any apartments yet (mostly likely due to his price, see below) but declared that waiting for people to come to him was basically his business model. The overall picture for these 'middle-class' residential towers is that the developers need to gather a starting capital, which they find in their extended networks, and are then able, on the whole, to rely on geographical proximity for the sale of the remaining apartments<sup>49</sup>.

Probably tied to this *laissez-venir* policy is the lack of any strong preoccupation about who the customers are – at least in their conversations with me<sup>50</sup>. This is perhaps surprising given the popular politicization of real estate in Beirut. It is possible that the very reliance on network and proximity to the site ensures that economic relations follow in line with previously established social relations (and thus pose fewer occasions for

49 Again, the boom might be a condition of possibility here. Contrast with Samaha's case, who started building in an earlier period, in 2002, and needed to get a *simsar* to complete his sales. Since then the urgency has increased for families to get the best deal, or for investors to capitalize on potential profit.

50 This is certainly not a rule. Bou Akar (2012) shows that in the case of a far southern suburb, on the shifting edge between 'Druze' and 'Shia' spaces, people become more and more preoccupied with demographics as conflict between parties (here, the PSP and Hizbullah) become apparent. By contrast, the automaticity observed in Khandaq points to some sort of a banality of politicization or territorialization – sectarian segregation is by and large reproduced (Sunni and Shia plots stay Sunni or Shia), as a naturalized political fact on the ground.



reflexion). Generally at least, the attitude seems to be 'come what may'. When developers did set standards for their customers, they were class related. Najjar, the retired lawyer who renovated his father's building, was adamant that only respectable people enter his building. This is partly premised on the fact that he *lets* his apartments and does not intend on selling them. His relation to the customer therefore transcends the sales contract. Najjar was quite bitter about what the refugees had 'done to his building' and did not want a repeat experience. He therefore discarded the possibility of letting to someone from the neighbourhood. Most likely he makes an equation between lower class, refugees, unrespectable and Shia (a common associative chain in Lebanon). Bazzi, the developer of the most recent building I queried, also had standards, but his were directly related to the high price he was asking (\$350,000, certainly not high for Beirut standards, but above the Khandaq level, which was still some \$100,000 lower). Samaha also might have imagined different customers, 'gentrifiers' if you will, attracted to Solidified prospects for the neighbourhood. But like Bazzi that was on the basis of an economic calculation (upturn of the neighbourhood), not a social (sectarian) one (this might actually account for the fact that the building is now one of the most confessionally diverse buildings in the neighbourhood – as an outsider with a deadline, Samaha attracted whomever he could, including other outsiders)<sup>51</sup>. The developer of the tower overlooking the Bachoura cemetery might be most representative for the general attitude. He explicitly professed not to do any serious checks. As far he was concerned, he cannot be held responsible for what people do in the building once he has handed over the papers. However he did see a certain auto-selection by the customers themselves. Because in fact all the people who live there now already knew each other before. Not that they knew from the beginning who were the other clients, but when they started inquiring about the building, they also asked about their potential neighbours, finding out that of course they knew who such and such was, and that they were good people (in the frictionless picture he painted).

In light of the terms of this chapter, one thing of this overview should immediately catch one's attention: the lack of intervention by political parties in these real-estate transactions, either by backing certain actors or by participating as actor themselves in order to secure a political and thus sectarian hegemony. Also the developers themselves profess no preoccu-

51 This might also be an indication of a future trend, tied to an historical shift away from private owners with personal ties to building and neighbourhood, like Najjar, to entrepreneurs and companies who build to sell and move on, like Samaha.

pation with such political or sectarian questions. The dimension of the territorial logic according to which political parties seek to constitute and protect the demographics of a given area is therefore absent here. What does this imply for people's political imagination? The same dimension of territorialization was also relinquished in the case of the Christian neighbourhood, but still people tended to see the area as part of sectarian competition. Moreover, the rising prices that the work of these developers in the heart of the neighbourhood symbolizes and actively contributes to are the source of much anxious talk in the neighbourhood. Such anxiety should provide fertile ground for politicization of their work. In fact, there is a whole body of literature on urban politics that takes that very anxiety as its very premise. Politics in the city would arise out the tension between the search for profit over space and the existential needs of those dwelling in that space. It may be fruitful to take a detour through this body of literature to clarify our present questions, i.e., what matters people politicize in Beirut and within the frame of which political imagination.

**Capitalism and the political in Beirut** Marxist theorization has dominated urban studies (in geography more so than in sociology) ever since David Harvey's (1973) exploration in *Social Justice and the City* of the shortcoming of traditional – 'liberal' – geography and his search for their resolution in the neo-Marxist political economy that came out of France (primarily in the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells). While applications and research directions are varied, in the foreground or in the background, there has always been a preoccupation with the 'capitalist city'. The key to these efforts lies in the return to the very fundamental principle of Marxist political economy, which as Soja (2000: 95) reminds us, "revolved around the inbuilt social necessity within capitalism to produce and reproduce poverty and inequality". Harvey and those that followed in his footsteps have analysed how the built environment enables and conditions the reproduction of capitalism (that is, the conditions of accumulation, consumption and renewed investment) and how the enlistment of the built environment in the capitalist project reproduces the inequality inherent to capitalism on a spatial scale. In order to indicate how this argument works, I first revisit one of the fundamental master categories that capture the logic of the neo-Marxist explanatory mode, the production of space, after which I move on to the kind of politics thought to follow from such production of space.<sup>52</sup> We should then be able to



frame more clearly what politics we should expect in Khandaq.

**The politics of accumulation and consumption** Capital makes and remakes the city into its image. The – only slightly tongue-in-cheek – deification of capital implicit in Harvey's early slogan is paradigmatic for his theoretical framework. His aim is primarily to spell out the logic of urbanization in the age of capitalist accumulation, secondarily to point out the plausibility of the mechanisms he identifies by marshalling various data sets of (regional) economic performance, and only finally to get into the nitty-gritty of actual case studies (and when he does get into it, he does it with so much for relish for the nitty-gritty that Savage & Warde [1993: 48] argue he loses sight of the theoretical framework). That means that his primary units of analysis are such like 'production', 'consumption' or the 'circulation of capital when viewed in aggregate' (all mentioned in Harvey 1989: 21). Thus, in some of his pieces, talk is more about the capitalist city in general than about any city in particular, as exemplified in the following quote: "Production is typically separated from consumption under capitalism by market exchange. This has enormous implications for urbanization and urban structure. Work spaces and times separate out from consumption spaces and times in ways unknown in an artisan or peasant culture" (id.). We will see there is some loss in translation going from the city in general to a city in particular.

I will discuss two – interlinked – examples of Harvey's kind of argumentations about how the city changes. Among his more famous theoretical statements is the 'switch' between circuits of capital circulation. The first circuit is that of productive capital. The second is the built environment – infrastructure and housing. The third is science, technology and education. He incorporates this classification of the workings of capitalist economies into the older Marxist postulate of the inherent instability of capitalism, one specific elaboration of which is the theory of over-accumulation. Over-accumulation occurs because capitalists (roughly, those with money to spare, cf. Harvey 1989: 9) need to continually reinvest their surplus capital (commonly known as profit) in order to survive the competition from fellow capitalists. This increases the availability of goods on the market and also generally tends to reduce the amount of labour power needed to produce those goods, because of technological innovations that

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not do justice to the diversity of the field. However, arguably each is foundational to, and thus exemplary for, a certain paradigm within the Marxist field – Harvey for his definite focus on the structural side of urban production, and Logan & Molotch for bringing in situated agency into the conceptual framework.

make the capitalist enterprise more competitive. In other words, capitalist reinvestment also tends to create labour surpluses (i.e., unemployment). You then have a situation where goods can no longer be 'absorbed' (i.e., bought by people with little purchasing power) and the re-investments cannot be realized. In this situation, capitalists seek to 'fix' their problem of useless and thus threatening surplus capital by finding other targets of investment. This is where the circuits come in. So far money (capital) has been circulating within the first, productive circuit. When that circuit has become exhausted as above, capitalists move on to the second one. Harvey tries to make this plausible by showing the correlation between economic crises and surges in construction. The American suburbs, for example, would have been built in such attempts to absorb falling rates of profit. This is one of the ways Harvey wants to show us how urban development is narrowly tied to economic processes, specifically to the cyclically changing interests of 'capital'. (Harvey 1989: 60ff.)

While this (simplified summary) may point to circumstances *when* capital is freed up for the development of urban space, it doesn't yet specify *how* or *where* such development takes place. While, as mentioned, Harvey's strong suit isn't the case study, he does lay out a basic framework of the interests that guide urban development. I'll take two examples. One way is to trace how residential segregation goes back to people's differential relation to capital. Residential segregation is, as "observed but not explained" by the geographic literature, at bottom that "similar people like to, or just do, live close to each other" [id: 109]. Rephrased in more sophisticated terms, residential patterns follow social structure. Social structure, in turn, follows out of relations to capital, as the doxa holds. Following Giddens, Harvey identifies five 'forces' that derive from "the dynamics of capitalist society" and which structure social differentiation, such as labour specialization, consumption and life-style, or class consciousness. Working-class (esp. immigrant) neighbourhoods for example once came into being in necessary solidarity to survive hard economic times and have since then continued to reproduce working-class values and labour qualities. Suburbs for the better-to-do are created, as explained above, "to [sustain] an effective demand for products", but they are successful as geographical entities in part by the rise of a middle-class "imbued with the ideology of competitive and possessive individualism" and the financial means to "acquire market capacity" (id: 120ff.). In other words, the concentration of such population groups and the reification of their social and cultural features through the so-called 'neighbourhood effect', then help to reproduce the diverse labour qualities required for capitalist society. Capital and people's relation to it then not only drives

when development of the city occurs, but also where and how.

A second mechanism that Harvey discusses is tied to his conception of urban politics. Urban politics comes forth out of two dynamics or 'contradictions': 'internal' competition over the city – between capital and labour – on the one hand, and external competition between cities, on the other. Naturally these two dynamics have an impact on each other. The compromises between capital and labour interests affect the locational competitive position of a city. The investments (in the production of goods or delivery of services) to enhance that position have an impact on relations between capital and labour, by creating redundancies or setting new functional requirements for workers. So in between these two contradictions, what happens to the urban social and physical fabric? The internal contradiction is directly a politics of class, in the sense that it is a push-and-pull struggle between two groups who relate differently to the city *defined as* interrelated labour and commodity markets. The stakes of such struggles can be wages, working conditions, or consumption of private as well as public goods, like education. (id: 142) In turn, such struggles have an effect on where people live, work and consume – i.e., where they have access to which labour and consumption markets. The external contradiction results in what Molotch (1973) has termed 'growth coalitions'. These are varying alliances of members of the local "ruling class" that seek to "boost" their location by seeking access to the state, which they need to lay the ground for the innovation of the local economic sector. Since the local capitalists cannot in fact bear the risks of such new investments themselves, they "collectivize [these] risks through finance capital and the state". With such innovation, the whole city changes, as it spills over into "consumption, household reproduction, social services (e.g. education, health care), administration, cultural activities, and political processes". The city can only survive geographical competition in perpetually finding the "appropriate mix of life-styles, social provision, cultural forms, and politics and administration". (Harvey 1989: 156-8)

We have come a long way from Beirut. In order gauge the relevance of this sociology built out of the experience of industrializing and then deindustrializing US and Britain, a short summary of the logic of the argument is in order. First we have to stress the following bottom line: "Harvey's analysis [...] conceptualized the significance of investment in the built environment in relation to other economic processes, suggesting links between urban restructuring and economic restructuring" (Savage & Warde 1993: 48). The premise that the economy is central to the organization of the city – and thus also that urban politics is ultimately an economic politics – will be important for our exploration of how the para-

digm plays out in Khandaq. Second, Harvey's actors are concrete abstract condensations of real-world people and institutions: (finance) capital, labour, sometimes he speaks of the property owner or rentier, and finally the state. The 'actions' of these actors are all animated by the internal contradictions of the capitalist system, such as the laws of competition, the resulting inevitable crises in the accumulation process, or the opposition of class interests. Actors coalesce and break up in strategies and struggles to defend or improve their place, as individuals or as groups, in the accumulation 'machine'. The politics that result is thus based on the *politicization of accumulation and consumption* – that is, based on the question what leeway capitalists get to (re-) organize the production process in the interest of profit and what investments are made into the 'reproduction' of the labourer, in terms of wages and collective amenities. Third, then, the city parcels out these different groups, reifying these groups and their oppositions in times of stability, further disrupting them in times of transformation (of crisis or innovation). In the following, I will go into the equally influential work of Logan & Molotch, who pick up on Harvey's work but apply it in a more case-sensitive manner, if you will. They still do retain the fundamentals of the framework, as outlined. As we slowly head back to Beirut, two of these fundamentals will prove problematic: the focus on economics (accumulation and consumption) as the *locus* of politicization, and the opposition of two clusters of actors within that politicization.

**Residents, entrepreneurs and the politics of space in Khandaq** The conceptualization Logan & Molotch (1987) formulate of urban politics follows Harvey's closely but is considerably tuned and refined. It follows out of their basic reaction to the idea of the production of space, which goes a little bit as following: 'the market is indeed important, paramount even, but someone like Harvey (bless him) never really explained *how* this urban growth for capital accumulation actually works'. Their solution is introduce 'the human factor'. The capitalist interests are certainly there, but they narrow them down to rent interests – that is, the value of land and the built environment. That value is only profitable if the area in question is an attractive one – attractive for consumption, attractive for construction, or attractive for industry. Logan & Molotch' first innovation is therefore to centre the production of space around the question of how capitalists can boost the *exchange value* of the city. One problem such capitalists immediately run into is that the same land and built environment also have a *use value* for its current owners and occupants. Typically, the latter are not interested in the rise of the exchange value of the land they live on, because it may mean they no longer have a place there. The

city and its transformation is thus the result out of the conflict between two – in their analysis more or less diametrically opposed – interests in land: the interest in either its exchange value or its use value. That conflict makes up urban politics, which they define as the politics of the “social organization of property and space” (1987: 38).

The ‘capitalists’ and the ‘users’ above are specified respectively as ‘entrepreneurs’, who band together into a ‘growth coalition’<sup>53</sup>, and as ‘residents’, who seek strength in numbers in the ‘community’. Logan & Molotch use the term “entrepreneurs” (or “place entrepreneurs”) for “the people directly involved in the exchange of places and collection of rents, have the job of trapping human activity at the sites of their pecuniary interests”, and a “special group among the privileged: modern urban *rentiers*, somewhat analogous to their feudal landholding predecessors” (1987: 29). They identify three contemporary types: serendipitous entrepreneurs, active entrepreneurs, and structural speculators. The first type represents someone who may have inherited land, or owns land that he worked until he realized it would yield much greater value for other uses. He is essentially passive, like the classic rentier. The second strives for rent by buying into places of future profit, mostly by following emergent developments. The last type seeks to influence or create such emergent development through intervention, by zoning or attracting business or construction. The rent they seek is often monopolistic or ‘redistributive’ (i.e., through the appropriation of pre-existing values, usually through state action – this is where Harvey got his ideas about elites in inter-urban competition from).

Clearly, the most likely analytical candidates for the people involved in the production of space in the heart of Khandaq would be the serendipitous and the active entrepreneurs. The serendipitous entrepreneurs would be the landowners who decide to make a buck out of their property instead of putting it to gainful or functional use, whereas the active entrepreneurs would be the small-time developers on the lookout for an opportunity to make a buck themselves (though in Logan & Molotch active entrepreneurs are identified only as investors, not as developers). Yet, the categories don’t quite fit. Logan & Molotch reserve a – disproportionate – share of their discussion of entrepreneurs for the structural speculators, even tending to conflate the two. Likely, this is an inheritance

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53 They borrow this phrase from Molotch’ earlier use and further develop it in the broader framework outlined directly below. Such growth coalitions are made up primarily by ‘who stand most to gain by decisions about land-use’, that is the land owners and entrepreneurs, but to promote their interests they also attempt to enlist city councillors (elected with the former’s support), media and (semi-) public utilities organizations.

of the Harveyan neo-Marxist analytical apparatus, in particular the opposition between 'capital' and 'labour' which is transposed here onto 'entrepreneurs' and 'residents'. That opposition subsequently runs in intuitive parallel to an opposition between the *locus* of agency and dormant agency, respectively. As a consequence, Logan & Molotch are so focused on either powerful actors who shape the city according to their own design, or on the ordinary folks who react to these designs that they seemingly fail to note what is actually going on in the middle between these two opposites.

In that 'middle', firstly, we can observe that even while the small-time developers are individually insignificant (perhaps easily relegated to a secondary category of analysis), collectively they have a significant impact on the neighbourhood 'ecology': they have serious consequences for its demographic composition (class, confession) and the related territorial identity of the area (as their customers come from neighbourhood networks – in the cases I've examined, both Sunni and Shia). Moreover their work drives up prices and raises the value of the neighbourhood, setting up new developments opportunities in the future, while making it more difficult for many residents to hold onto their homes. Secondly, a focus on the opposition between the two poles hides from view the collusion that occurs between residents and entrepreneurs. Not only collusion in the sense that landowners become (serendipitous) entrepreneurs, but also in the sense that other residents are interested in investment opportunities – to buy off the map and resell on delivery (although some also make longer-term investments, especially with expat money).

What kind of consequences would that have, thirdly, for urban politics here? Politicization of the work of these developers appears to be absent. On the one hand, the entrepreneurs themselves are not organized into any kind of collective that furthers their interests. They are obviously networked, they will exchange services and at times collaborate, but nothing further than that. There is no 'growth coalition' that is actively involved in the politics of space and place. From the residents' point of view, on the other hand, there is subsequently also no collective to oppose. But it's not just that. A comparison with attitudes about the activities in the old Christian neighbourhood should bring that out. Whereas these are commonly seen with misgivings, whether those be of sectarian nature ('they' are trying to get us out of here) or of class ('they' don't build apartments anymore), the only time I heard someone speak out against one of the local developers, was when, during a conversation between neighbours about house hunts, someone called him 'stupid' (*ḥmār*, donkey), not to be taken seriously, for asking such high prices. There is a certain intimacy

here. Their 'smallness' may be one of the reasons why exchange values of Khandaq's small-time developers are not politicized: being 'of' the people, they are not considered representatives of 'big interests', as an 'other' to mistrust or resist. People also simply (sufficiently) *know* them and how they operate, and therefore do not have to resort to speculation (with its concomitant conspirative dimensions). In other words, in addition to the fact that some residents have stake in the exchange values (as home buyers or 'ordinary' investors), both the 'amateur' reality of the developers that were locally active, as well as the way that residents subsequently perceived them, blurred the potential boundary between them and made a political consciousness and struggle that arises out of the conflict of interests between exchange and use values unlikely.

So what does this say about Harvey's and Logan & Molotch' conception of urban politics? Their conception is based on two key assumptions. One is that the city is made by big interests. These interests are concentrated in the growth coalitions who are locked into struggles with competing elites in different cities as well as with 'labour' or 'residents' over access to and control over space in the same city.<sup>54</sup> This assumption falls flat, by and large, as we've seen, in Khandaq. Now, certainly Beirut does have its own 'big interests', its elite 'growth alliances', who have appealed to and infiltrated the state on the more powerful translocal levels (as Harvey predicts they would [1989: 153]). Big-time developers successfully lobbied for the legislation of favourable conditions for real estate development, and were able to place representatives in the Higher Council for Urbanism, a very useful regulatory organ that in practice supersedes the municipality's power in ratifying large developments (cf. Krijnen & Fawaz 2010: 124). Through that kind of 'redistributive' advocacy they have also created new conditions for work in Khandaq, where developers use the same kind of rules to increase the maximally allowed square feet of built surface.<sup>55</sup> But in all other senses, in

54 In part this has to do with the fact that Beirut was never the kind of industrial capitalist city the neo-Marxists studied (see Johnson 1986: 6, 104ff.; Dubar & Nasr 1976). Instead it was a mercantile and service capitalism, which arguably did not as neatly separate out class structure. That would make any residential segregation according to the relation to capital also a more blurry affair. In rough brush strokes, we could say that earlier in the previous century, manual workers settled near and in the economic centre of the city, itself slowly being abandoned by the better-to-do, but civil war has decentred the city, breaking up previous patterns, while sectarian affiliation has *always* cross-cut economic residential patterns (but especially so during the war), so economically many neighbourhoods came out of the war socio-economically diverse.

55 These are not the only aspects of the Beirut real-estate economy that look about right from that neo-Marxist perspective. Harvey's reflections about the circuits of capital are relevant, though it would require real research into the matter to find out how precisely. A good deal of the capital for all this construction is financed with money that comes from outside the country. On the one hand, there were investments from the Gulf economic region, particularly

Khandaq one can't really speak of 'big interests'. In other words, yes the city is made by big interests, but unevenly so. In Beirut and so many (postcolonial) cities like it, there is a whole world of small-time but large-scale development for which the neo-Marxist framework might not be terribly useful. What about the old Christian neighbourhood then? These high-value speculations do line up more closely with the neo-Marxist framework<sup>56</sup>. Yet, as we've seen, Khandaq residents have not developed any real politics over that either. That disjuncture has to do with the second assumption that 'it's the economy, stupid'. By contrast, this case suggests that politics in the city is not always or exclusively an "urban politics", which (as in Harvey's definition) follows out of the contradictions of capitalism, or (as in Logan & Molotch' understanding) is about "the social organization of property and space". One problem in such an approach is that exclusion of other vectors of politicization blurs our understanding of how the struggle over rent interests is played out. Instead, one may wonder what a politics over identity, ethnicity, or state power might do to these struggles. To take the example of the Christian neighbourhood, that area was opened up for renewed investment through a complex negotiation between two political blocs – Hizbullah and Amal on the one hand, Hariri's Future Movement on the other<sup>57</sup> – that involved compromises about 'state sovereignty', and was set in a period in which

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when things looked quite unstable there with the 2008 economic crash. Lebanon seemed unaffected, so part of the surplus that couldn't be reinvested in the Gulf sector got reinvested into real-estate elsewhere. Again, at least from a bird's eye perspective, that fits generally with Harvey's thesis. On the other hand, though, you have expat money, which obeys different logics, since it is not part of a switch between loci of investments and is relatively independent from economic cycles. Yet it is one of the main drivers of the real-estate sector in Lebanon.

56 In a sense, that area lines up with neo-Marxist theorisation about gentrification, in particular in Neil Smith's (1996) work. Smith hypothesized that gentrification occurred when disinvestment in a certain area had reach a certain low point, such that reinvestment would become profitable relative to other better-to-do areas. In one way, this is what happened in the old Christian neighbourhood, which first languished when other areas received new investments, then become subject to speculation in anticipation of a quick uptake of the area, and subsequently new development project started to change the 'ecology' of the area (after my fieldwork period, a large 'cultural' project was realized there, in addition to the more luxurious residential projects already mentioned in this chapter). In another way, however, it doesn't correspond to this model, since – and this echoes the critique of Harvey and Logan & Molotch in the ensuing paragraph – the 'cycles' of disinvestment and renewed investment didn't follow the laws of the market, but were created by war, displacement and post-war reconstruction politics. As to the heart of the neighbourhood, one could argue that gentrification is happening there as well – rising prices, displacement – but in contrast to this gentrification model, that socio-economic change is not accompanied by changes in lifestyle and "revanchist" claims to control over the neighbourhood. The social life of (re)development looks different from the UK-US.

57 Walid Jumblatt veered between the two (in his capacity of leader of the Druze, who are both key stakeholders in negotiations over refugees and reparation, and a key 'swinging voting bloc' in ever-shifting alliances).



a 'return to normality' was paradigmatic for public reflections about the fate of the displaced. These are not political conflicts of the capitalist kind, but obviously have a significant impact on the capitalist production of space (say, where and when residential or commercial real estate is realized). (Something very similar holds for the heart of Khandaq, obviously. Contradiction between labour and capital does not produce politics by itself, or to put it in Logan & Molotch' terms, property is not the competitive stake per se between space producers and consumers. Inter-urban competition is even entirely irrelevant here.) That is one point. The other concerns a question what an 'urban' politics about identity, ethnicity and state power looks like, or – to come at it from the opposition direction – what identity, ethnicity and notions of state power do for people's sense of the political independently of what it does for economic conflicts of interest. I start exploring that question in the following section.

**Conclusion** The way that people talk about (imminent, imagined) developments in the Christian neighbourhood shows that the territorial consciousness that various scholars imputed to the Lebanese is clearly present among Khandaq residents. However, the fact that developments in the heart of the neighbourhood are not discussed in territorial terms invites qualification of that presence. What is shared in both cases is a generalized insecurity. Most people worry about, or fear in some way for their place in the neighbourhood and the city, whether it be their own or their children's. That insecurity is the basis for how people talk about the city. What is different is the kind of uncertainty in each case. People's 'territorial' reflections about the fate of the Christian neighbourhood are at heart speculative reflections. They know something is up, but don't know what precisely. Perhaps much in line with how conspiracy theories work, the only (or at least semiotically tempting) recourse is to turn to impute the workings of powerful (and inimical) forces. In the heart of the neighbourhood, uncertainty makes way for familiarity, though not conviviality. Actors are reduced to human size, even while they are derided or even resented (as in the "donkey's" case). Likely, then, the perceived banality of these actors prevents people from developing 'residence' as the basis of a moral community, like Logan & Molotch' 'community of residents', and from taking up 'resident' as the basis for a political stance, as in a 'rights to the city' type of movement. Meanwhile, the amateuristic nature of the small-time entrepreneurs prevents them from banding together in a 'community of capitalists' – i.e., a growth coalition. Both prevent a politics of place from emerging.

Two remarks are in order. Firstly, while people do not currently situate

the political in the territory, it is a latent possibility. Given other circumstances, one can imagine they might start to. Thus, the fact that the parties have given up the old Christian neighbourhood as a 'territory' rather acts as a disincentive to identify with it and see it as part of a struggle between factions (and it may also explain, more than state authority which carries no weight in other examples we've seen, why no-one from the neighbourhood squats the empty buildings in that part of Khandaq, despite urgent pressure on the housing market). Should that change (more in line with, for example, Bou Akar's 2012 case; cf. fn. 50), 'territoriality' may well become more central to people's conception of their place and role in the political community. Secondly, even though insecurity does not translate into a 'residential' politics, it *is* transposed into the style of political imagination Khandaq residents actually do develop. That style does not proclaim rights to the city, but does insist on the dignity of the people.

## Chapter 3:

# Figurations of local governance: state authority and political power

In the previous chapter we saw that counter to how Marxist sociologists and geographers have conceived it, the production of space – while subject to popular scrutiny and worry – does not appear to be a dominant frame through which people from Khandaq see themselves as part of the body politic. Nor is sectarian competition for space such a dominant frame. In order to understand where they *do* situate their politics, we need to turn our attention to other fields – that of the political party and the local state. In this chapter I take up the question posed in Isin's and others' scholarship of citizenship, to wit, how people are assigned the status of 'citizens', and what such status entails. Two immediate specifications are in order. Firstly, we are of course assigned multiple positions in various ways across our participation in society, so I narrow down this question to what positions are available to people in context of the neighbourhood<sup>58</sup>. Secondly, however, given that positions are always only positions vis-à-vis other positions, this question does require us to look at the broader political field that makes up neighbourhood life. Within this field of governance, we have to look at how the various players address residents as certain kinds of members of the political community, allowing them relate to them as such. This chapter is primarily intended as a mapping exercise, to sketch the outlines of the field without going into how people actually navigate its relations and exploit its scope for action (which will follow in the next chapter). In particular, I trace the outlines of the field by zooming in on two figures of local governance, who, at the neighbourhood level, rep-

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58 I'm thus leaving out other contexts of people's lives, outside of the neighbourhood, like work life. These are limits due to the nature of my fieldwork, however for many people the neighbourhood *is* a central space in their lives.

resent and mediate in prominent ways the larger-scale formations of the state and the political party. The somewhat elusive, pictorial quality of the word ‘figure’ is intentional here. It suggests a position that has both certain structural qualities and a malleability, which allows different actual individuals across time and space take up the role differently. One of these figures is the so-called *mukhtār*, who has a formally designated function, that of a local state representative. The other, which ethnographies of politics (e.g., Hansen 2005: 119; Hansen & Stepputat 2006; Rutten 2001) tend to call a “strongman”, lacks such a formal designation, and merits his position on reputation and network. Both act as liaisons and middlemen in a relational triangle of constituent(s), (central) state, and (sectarian) political party. This chapter shows how the constellation of these various parties has evolved over the course of a century and a bit more, though especially over the past decades, up until the time of my fieldwork. The history of these ‘figures’ shows how the same basic tensions – over claims to sovereignty – recur between state and sectarian political leadership, in varying forms and understood in slightly varying vocabularies. These tensions and the way they have been framed also inform how residents perceive them (in terms of questions of sovereignty, that is), though I will only go into that in the next chapter. This chapter sets the scene, as it were.

Let me start by discussing the case of one such mukhtar I met during fieldwork, named Makki. His case encapsulates many of the themes important to this and the following chapter. Now, a mukhtar<sup>59</sup> is an elected, local state representative who deals with all things related to personal status. He (or she<sup>60</sup>) registers birth and death, residence and voting district, issues testimonies of identity (that people need when they interact with official institutions). But his authority extends beyond the domain of personal status. He provides testimonies of good conduct to the court for witnesses that hail from his constituency, registers children for school, authenticates rental contracts as well as other real estate property mutations. He thus serves in some way or fashion as an instance of mediation between citizens and various ‘central’ state institutions (ministries of education, agricultures, the judicial system, etc.). In Lebanon<sup>61</sup> the mukhtar

59 Sometimes confusingly translated as ‘mayor’, which really doesn’t cover it. Literally the term translates as ‘chosen’, or with more licence, ‘elected’.

60 Although in recent years a few female mukhtars have taken office, it was an office completely dominated by men and to a large extent still is.

61 As I explain below, the mukhtar is an Ottoman invention and other countries under previous Ottoman rule have retained the office. Remuneration is organized differently across these countries, though.



Ads for the mukhtar elections.



obtains his earnings from the fees he collects for each service. In principle, he can perform these services to anyone who requests them (though he would need to know them), he mostly performs them for

people in the district within which he is elected. Depending on the district – its wealth, the competition – and the reputation of the mukhtar, the pay can range from modest to quite profitable. Many mukhtars have a second job though.

The mukhtar is elected in ‘the’ local elections. In these elections, people vote in the members of their municipal council as well as their district mukhtars. The mandate is for 6 years. In 1998 (after much pressure from civil society groups), the first local elections since the civil war were held. Come 2010, then, Lebanon held its third local elections (see pictures above). The day after the elections, I stood on the corner from the Khandaq mosque, talking to some of the carpenters who have their premises in this historical carpenters’ *sūq* (market). The topic of discussion were, of course, the elections. Just then a few men came up, who took in gratulatory words and gestures from different sides, and I got introduced to one of them: the new mukhtar. Festively and confidently he shook hands and continued his small tour of victory up the street. After he’s moved on, one of the carpenters commented: *It’s a shame. Mukhtar Makki lost in the elections. His office is just down there. The parties didn’t want him anymore. He’s a poor and simple man (m`atter), but at least he’s honourable.* In the few days that followed, I heard similar sentiments from other people. *There’s no room for the righteous here*, a local businessman reflected. I decided to look up the former mukhtar. I found him on the same street, sitting next to the mosque on some wobbly chairs, talking with residents

as they walk by and sometimes stop for small talk. We started talking as well and a conversation started that spanned several occasions and several sites – the street, his (now) bare office and his office supplies shop near the Hamra neighbourhood. Makki didn't live in the neighbourhood anymore but he continued to come to his office frequently or sit outside to chat. Afterwards he would go up the street to this mother's, 96 years old, and have dinner and make sure she was taken good care of. "It's important to assume these responsibilities", though he was the only one among his brothers to do so. He came across as a proud person and he knew how to colour events in a way favourable to his image, a skill typical for men of a certain status.

His story, coloured it may be, illustrates a number of stages in the evolution of local power configurations, and in particular the experimental period of (political) reconstruction that followed the end of the civil war. Makki's father had been a mukhtar of the district for a number of decades, until his death in 1972. In those days there were few elections (in fact, since independence only 2 elections were held, in 1953 and 1964 [Murad 1997: 104]) and most mukhtars entered or stayed in office by ministerial decree. Makki sr. had been closely tied to the Aamiliye Islamic Society for Charity, which was set up by probably the most important Shia political figure in Beirut at the time, Rachid Beydoun. Makki remembers those days favourably, in which the mukhtar was an important figure and a resource for high level politicians. The mukhtar would have access to ministers, Makki assured me, and once, when his father was received by the Prime Minister, the latter came down the stairs to greet him, *which, if you know, is a great sign of respect that you don't give to just anyone*. His father had also been well respected and beloved locally, as he had been a man who cared even for people who might not be able to afford his service fees. Moreover, people came to him when they were in need of other assistance as well, to resolve a marital dispute or to find a job. When local elections were held for the first time after the war in 1998, Sami Makki decided he would run as well, to continue his father's tradition.

Before 1975, the total number of mukhtars for the Bachoura district, of which Khandaq forms the larger part, was five: three Sunni mukhtars, 1 Shia and 1 "Christian"<sup>62</sup>. However, in 1998, the number was raised and the sectarian balance was recalculated to include 10 mukhtars of which 6 were Shia and 4 Sunni. The update was to be more in sync with the new demographic realities. Or at least, with the realities of electoral voter

62 None of the informants ever specified which 'Christian' sect precisely had been represented, from other sources I gather it was Armenian though.

registration. In Lebanon, due to complications I will go into later, many people are registered as voters in their ancestral villages. This includes the majority of Shia residing in the Beirut metropolitan area – including Khandaq residents. Thus the new balance of Sunni and Shia mukhtars does not reflect the actual residential demographic. In terms of voters registered in the Bachoura district, the voter roll for 2009 showed roughly 23,000 Shia and about 20,000 Sunni voters (Al-Akhbar, 2010-03-23, Rajana Hamyeh). (Both have gone up significantly since 2000, but the Sunna more significantly, the reason for which I discuss below). There are also a few thousand Christians – mostly Armenians – registered there, but because they don't actually live there, they have not requested the presence of one.

Before I can go back to Makki's story, I need to explain still one more facet of the electoral process. Lebanon has had the tradition of running on *electoral lists* for a long time, at least on the national level. As a hopeful politician, you run for a seat that is reserved to the sect you are officially assigned to. District seats are distributed across to the relative size of each sect's registered voter bloc. However, each voter cast votes for each seat in the district, regardless of sectarian adherence. This favours electoral alliances on the district level. (These alliances are usually made across sectarian boundaries, because most electoral districts are mixed.) They work in the following way. After forming said alliance (the "list"), one then tells one's constituency to vote for each of its members, an injunction to which most people stick, and the winning list takes all. At least since 1998<sup>63</sup>, this is the running practice in mukhtar elections as well. In local elections they are so-called "unity lists" and they go under such ringing titles as 'Sons of Bachoura' (*ibnā' bashūra*), literally translated, or more freely translated, 'Bachoura's Own'. The "unity list" is an invocation of the best intentions of the politicians involved to prevent 'trouble' that might occur if the fate of the opposing parties would actually be decided by unorganized votes on election day<sup>64</sup>. By agreeing to each other's candidates, cross-sectarian unity and peace is guaranteed. While this may be some part of the reason, in practice it does not seem that agreeing with each other's candidates is the purpose of the list. I was unable to hear about any example of one party interfering in the selection process of the other, even if such negotiation is theoretically possible. It seems more important that the parties decide

63 And probably before, though I wasn't able to find a source to attest to that. It's likely however, given that the municipal candidates – part of the same local elections – also ran on lists previously (see e.g. Ishtay 2001: 61).

64 It resonates similar invocations on a national scale, where "national unity cabinets" never go out of fashion.



to give each other one's votes. This is how that works. Most people in fact vote for the proposed unity list in its entirety, on actual pieces of paper provided to them, which they drop into the voting box. (It does also happen frequently that people cross out *certain* names on the list, and replace them with candidates outside the list. As a consequences, the head of the list in Bachoura walked away with about 90% of the vote whereas the lowest performer on the official list still got some three quarters of the total votes.) In that way, most of the Sunna give the Shia parties their votes and most of the Shia give the Sunni party their votes. The parties can't lose. Independents stand virtually no chance, though there are independents who are considered to have built up such a large constituency that they are asked to join the list (thus avoiding the danger that the less popular member of their list might be crossed out and replaced by the popular independent candidate).

In 1998, two candidates seem to have taken the initiative to build a list. For the Shia, it was Makki, while on the Sunni side, it was a candidate who had been the mukhtar before the war as well and was part of a second-tier Beiruti notable family (or really, more a clan). That Makki should have been at the joint head of the list was rather logical, because his father had been the only Shia mukhtar in the area, and they stemmed from an numerically important alliance of local families. The list would have been formed in negotiation with the electoral machines of the political parties. In Khandaq, there are basically three parties: for the Sunna Hariri's party, which was later dubbed the Future Movement; and for the Shia, Amal and Hizbullah.

In 1998 only Hizbullah and Hariri's Movement joined in a list, Amal stayed out of it – for reasons I will try to elucidate below. So Makki negotiated with Hizbullah's electoral machine and they established a list. I do not know the details of these negotiations, but Makki had once ensured me that parties weren't "very strong" in those days (i.e. around the turn of the century), so they didn't "impose" themselves on the electoral process. There could be some truth in this perspective: Makki would have been a relative asset to the list, running on the reputation and network of his father and family, drawing in many votes. In Makki's words, it was "thanks to his father's name" that people voted for him. So this would have given him some stature and therefore room for negotiation, which suited Makki just fine, because he had always been "independent" and just wanted to be "correct", to give each his own – like his father.

In 2004, at the end of the 6 year mandate, they voted for him again. But in 2010 Makki didn't make it. In fact, he wasn't even on the electoral list anymore that was now supported by all the political parties, including



Amal. So why was Makki taken off the electoral list? Makki himself didn't elaborate on what happened, but a local successful businessman who had also tried to run that same year gave the following explanation. In a sense, it was Makki's own celebrated "independence" that took him out of the race. The businessman explained that, in exchange for a party's endorsement, the mukhtar has to bring votes. And Makki refused to do so. "They didn't take him on the list, 'cause he didn't do the work. He didn't bring people [...], to get [them] to the voting booths. He didn't have an electoral machine. He didn't bring employees – he didn't bring anyone."

**Enacting citizenship in a local field of political mediation** The chapter elucidates why a man who seemed to enjoy local esteem and popularity as well as the endorsement of the political forces still lost his seat. As indicated, it is story of the evolution of the relations between political actors, state institutions and local constituencies. I tell the story by looking at two figures of local politics – the mukhtar and the strongman – and their shifting relations to the state and to centres of political power (whether that be notable politicians or political parties). Historically, strongmen in urban neighbourhoods were called '*qabadays*' (*qabadayāt* in the Arabic plural) in the Middle Eastern region. People used the term for those who wheel and deal in the margins of the law, yet also act as a communal champion of the neighbourhood, and are often part of the political network of high-level political actors. Nowadays, the qabaday is commonly seen as a phenomenon of the ('traditional') past, both by scholars of the Levant as Lebanese themselves, so the choice for this second figure may not seem obvious at first sight. Yet, as a *figure* of local, 'informal' governance, the qabaday remains evocative and interesting to think with in relation to the process of political reconstitution, over the course the past twenty-odd years. The shifts in political positions and functions that make up this process, occur within a pattern of continuities and discontinuities. The mukhtar might give up some power to political parties but his role of mediation is not over. Likewise, you may no longer find qabadays that correspond to the historical ideal type, but other kinds of strongmen are now clearly standing in his shoes.

The historical and ethnographic narratives of these evolutions serve to address those issues that were part of the 'qualities of citizenship' strand of Paley's (2002) anthropology of democracy. If you'll recall from the introduction, the kinds of ideas about and claims to citizenship that people formulate depends on the status positions assigned to them in a given legal system, as well as the actual social and political fields of actions in which such positions may or may not be realized. In this chapter, then,

we start to get a better sense of how Lebanon's sectarian system works in distributing rights and duties among its citizens: rather than taking the system as a given, I look at how it exists through the particular political relations through which it is distributed and enacted.

The questions of this chapter carry us into a consideration of relations of mediation – the mediation of constituency, state, and (sectarian) political leadership. With this suggestion, I do not mean to invoke such accounts of comparative politics that relegate these political relations to a 'democracy with an adjective' (Collier and Levitsky 1997; for other overviews, see Landé 1983; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007). When political logics do not conform to the model of the all-are-equal-before-the-law, representation-by-individual-vote and bureaucratically rationalized (Western) state, such authors draw on the notion of mediation (brokerage) to characterize such non-conforming states.<sup>65</sup> Access to the political and access to the state is obtained on the basis of 'connections' that offer individualized, 'personalistic' or 'privatized' resources and representation (rather than 'direct' access thanks to formalized and impersonal rules that provide resources to duly defined sections of a population). Therefore, clientelism, patronage and negotiations through "informal power" are seen as special cases of a different kind of political paradigm – that of mediated representation.

While this is not incorrect, the point is really moot. All things (political) are mediated – if the reader will allow me to take this inspiration-light from Actor-Network approaches. As Mol (2010: 257) explains for the uninitiated, the ANT approach goes back to Saussure's structural idea that "words do not point directly to a referent, but form part of a network of words. They acquire meaning relationally, through their similarities with and differences from other words". In ANT, "this semiotic understanding of relatedness has been shifted on from language to the rest of reality. Thus it is not simply the term, but the very phenomenon of "fish" that is taken to exist thanks to its relations" (id). What a fish 'is' (how it behaves, metabolizes food, etc.) depends on whether it's a fish in a river or in a fish tank. Or, to move on to the human plane, every relation exists by the grace of 'third parties' that provide the elements that ultimately link up, say, two actors in an (economic) exchange. The same goes for political logics – the connection that is established between politicians and constituencies, or between state institutions and citizens depend on a myriad of practices of mediation. The proper politically scientific ques-

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65 As Gellner observed, political patronage "intrigues" 'us' because it "offends our egalitarianism and our universalism" (in Singerman 1995: 135).

tion is thus not whether mediation defines political relations, but in what kind of relational context mediation is accomplished in its particular local form. This chapter therefore sets itself the modest aim of explicating the nature of forms of political mediation, historically and ethnographically, in Khandaq. Doing so will also give us a first insight into what citizen-roles are offered and assigned to people (in the context of the neighbourhood).

**Local statehood: a short history of the mukhtar** The position of the mukhtar was originally created in order for the Ottoman Empire to exert its authority in the more marginal (rural) areas and into the lowest levels of administrative hierarchies. Successor (mandatory, national) regimes have similarly attempted to use the mukhtar as part of an alternative power structure that could wrest power from local actors, primarily located in the hands of the family, or the 'clan'. However, as we shall see, a tug of war resulted in which such notable local families attempted to appropriate the office for their own purposes. It is worthwhile retracing that tug of war, as similar battles are fought out today and inform people's sense of the political.

While interpretations differ in detail as to why the Ottomans introduced the mukhtar's office, the common thread is that the heads of local families and clans – usually referred to as 'shaykhs' (*shuyūkh*, literally: elders) – thwarted the attempt by the Ottoman High Porte to modernize the empire<sup>66</sup>. Thus, the recalcitrant local chieftains prevented the cultivation of bona fide Ottoman citizens (Reilly 1981); the notable family heads, who often acted as tax collectors, had been a recurrent source of deeply dividing revolts and ethnic conflict<sup>67</sup>, thus disrupting social order (Murad 1997); and traditional power structures were an obstacle to land and tax reforms that were needed to foster capitalist development throughout the empire (Murad 1997; cf. Mundy 2000). The mukhtar was subsequently given several powers and functions: some of the judicial powers (such as powers of arbitration) were taken away from the traditional councils made up of the family elders and vested in an elected council with the mukhtar at its head; also the mukhtar was to function as a source of intelligence to the government and central state organs (e.g., by reporting

66 This was the century of the *tanzimāt*, launched in 1839, which intended to enhance the viability of the Empire by promoting something of a constitutional patriotism against new nationalist movements, streamlining the bureaucratic apparatus and laying the groundwork for a capitalist economy.

67 At least in Mount Lebanon where several 'tax revolts' took place (of which some turned into 'civil war') in the 1830s and onward.

crimes, threats and culprits)<sup>68</sup>; and he was given an important role in the calculation and distribution of the tax burden, which offered significant opportunities to increase one's influence.

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the office followed differing regional trajectories with subsequent regimes. Baer (1980) enumerates the increasing policing duties he was given in Palestine, and in the militarized context of the Jordanian state the mukhtar was given several duties related to military security. A little to the north, meanwhile, the French authorities did also replicate the security related duties of the mukhtar, but their main project appeared to concern setting up a modern Lebanese state powered by capitalist enterprise. The French thus clearly picked up on the mukhtar's role in reforming financial regimes and the 'liberation of property', for which the mukhtar had been a crucial instrument (Murad 1997: 83). The remuneration for their work here "helped to draw them into capitalist relations on the one hand, and their capacity to re-deploy that wealth in the acquisition of real-estate made many of them into big landowners on the other" (ibid.: 84).<sup>69</sup> According to Murad, therefore, the mukhtar was a linchpin in creating the social reality of capitalist relations throughout Lebanon.

Aside from such judicial and administrative innovations, scholars recurrently point out how the office of the mukhtar remained a battle site between central authorities and local powers. The British in Palestine perceived the mukhtar as being too tightly embedded in a collective social structure. They expected him to be unwilling, say, to give up names of those involved in crimes, instead referring to 'traditional' authorities to deal with retribution. So they tried setting up alternative local councils, hopefully more positively inclined towards British policy needs (Miller 1980). The French, on their side, devised ways of increasing the powers of the office in Lebanon, while ensuring those powers would accrue to the state rather than their local competitors, the big families. So on the one hand, they eliminated the (arbitrational powers of the) traditional and pre-existing Council of Elders (*shuyūkh*), reinforcing the office of the mukhtar. On the other hand, they instituted an oath (of loyalty to state and nation) and introduced an amendment in the electoral law that prohibited the extended family from presenting multiple candidates in one district or from running candidates in multiple districts. (Murad 1997:

68 Leading Murad to conclude that "the mukhtar is the true representative to the authority of the state, its wakeful eye in the village and the neighbourhood" (1997: 84).

69 See also Baer for the Palestinian case, who came across many court cases where mukhtars were accused of selling common village land for which they were the trustees if no Village Council existed. (1979: 107f.)

81).<sup>70</sup> These measures were attempts to curb the de facto appropriation of the office by families.

Yet whatever we can say about the balance of power between local mukhtar and central government, the fact is that, as Murad (1997) observes, the mukhtar played a crucial role in the work and establishment of various state offices, instituting the social reality of the state throughout the territory. Certainly this was a change in the Ottoman period, in which territories were mostly governed Empire-style – by (tax collecting) proxies. Yet also in subsequent periods, the mukhtar constituted an everyday face of the state. This leads us to a number of questions: what is the position of the mukhtar today in the political playing field of central state institutions, political parties and local power brokers? What effect does such a position have for the “social reality of the state” on the ground? While the first question guides the remainder of this chapter, the second will take us into the following. Before addressing them, it is necessary to clarify the context of this case study – local governance in Khandaq – which is, in contrast to the majority of the (historical or ethnographic) studies about the mukhtar (for an ethnographic study see e.g., Salem 1965; also consider Peteet 1987), an urban setting. The village constitutes a different political field than the neighbourhood in the city. One of the important differences is the presence of a typically urban, more informal type of power broker, the strongman or, historically, the ‘qabaday’. The addition of this third figure complicates the balance of power between local and central authority.

**Local statehood in the capital: a dense political playing field** As the capital, Beirut has as a distinctive feature that it congregates a good number of its political actors as well its political constituencies (i.e., sects), and is concomitantly the main stage of the country’s political scene. The coincidence of local district and national political scene implies a certain intimacy between political leader and constituency. Johnson (1986) draws a picture of how this ‘political economy’ worked up until the civil war. National political leaders with their seat in Beirut (*zu`amā`* in the Arabic plural, or *za`ims* in the standard anglicised plural) maintained their popular support, necessary to elect them into the offices of the state, by ‘servicing’ members (or groups like families or civil organizations) which they

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70 Though they did not succeed in enforcing the rule – candidates of important families continued running in multiple districts, which in fact continued in the Independent period. One last way the French tried to get around this was to fall back on appointment (of people favourable to the governor) rather than depend on election.

accomplished primarily through the resources of the state (such as jobs) they so obtain through their offices (though charity organizations are another important source). The key here is that the za'im accomplished all this through personalistic relations with his constituency. That is to say, he did not represent it as a group, but exchanged services with individuals for their political support.

This poses a few logistical problems: on the one hand, the za'im needed to be accessible for the ordinary citizen. On the other hand, the za'im needed to make calculations about how valuable an individual was as an electoral resource and therefore how much service he (mostly he) was worth. Moreover, at times the leader needed to make a show of force by using the 'the street' – such as a demonstration in times of intensified political competition, armed defence when an issue needed to be forced, or simply to ensure electoral turnout. For all these organizational problems, the za'im would have recourse to the qabaday. The qabaday was someone who had built his reputation on violence and was often involved in shady businesses (usually involving one racket or another). He would have been perceived as a regular thug but for his respect for a code of honour which placed him at the defence of the community, sometimes of the poor and as someone who could break up local conflicts. The qabaday had local knowledge of his neighbourhood and its inhabitants, their trustworthiness and voting registration. Moreover, in virtue of his thugishness, he was also skilled in the mobilization and deployment of men when street politics was called for, whether that be for a demonstration or for fighting with adherents of rival politicians. In other words, such men would be quite useful for solving a za'im's logistical problem. Would a collaboration be struck, the za'im could also be of service to the strongman. In return for his mediation, the former would make sure his favourite thug would not wind up in jail or court. The qabaday thus served as an intermediary between political boss and constituency, and by extension, served as passage point between citizens and state services.

So far, I've provided a quick summary of Johnson's description of "dyadic" relations between the political leader and citizen. Interestingly, Johnson does not talk much of the mukhtar. When he does, he considers the mukhtar as a representative of a community – the neighbourhood – and as such someone who would be disqualified from the dyadic service game. The neighbourhood could be seen as an interest group, which disrupts the logic of the personal relation of leader and receiver. Never "was a contract made between the za'im and the *mukhtar* of a quarter, by which the elected quarter leader pledged the vote of the local inhabitants in return for an increased water supply or cleaner street" (1985: 95).

Yet, this perspective seems to overlook the extent to which the mukhtar enacted his representation of the neighbourhood community through the cultivation of individual relations. This could well have included advocacy of an individual's concerns with the za'im. Moreover, the 'intelligence' function that Johnson ascribes to the qabaday, could be fulfilled by the mukhtar as well – he too was well positioned to be informed about inhabitants and moreover was supposed to keep the registration of people's residence and voting district. However, it is unclear to which point the mukhtar was asked to play such a role (and what remuneration would have been considered appropriate for his services, or how a mukhtar's services related to the qabaday's position). Johnson's occlusion of the mukhtar from the story might be taken as an indication that, as far as daily operation of the political machine in the city was concerned, the authority of the mukhtar's office has been side-lined to large degree by the appeal to another powerful local institution (in so far as the intermediary, and thus to a certain degree structured and rule-bound, position of a local strongman can be called an institution).

**Consolidation of urban Shia into a political constituency** There are a few last considerations to take into account before we can start to properly analyse the mediation of state and politics in contemporary Khandaq (and the role of the mukhtar in it). The first is the particular trajectory of political institutionalization of the Shia 'community', which differs in a number of important ways from the historical image just painted; the second is the impact of the civil war on the constellation of these – mutually implicating – formal and informal governance arrangements.

The analysis of local urban politics by Johnson is in fact based on the Sunni case, and while Johnson does claim some general Lebanese validity (e.g., in stating that "given also the initial dominance of [Beirut] by Sunni notables, the history of Sunni Beirut is in many respects the history of Lebanon" 1985: 2]), we should allow for significant differences at least for the Shia case, especially in Beirut. As described in the first chapter, the period before the war was one of intense migration, in particular for Shia, who had constituted a rural community for a relatively long time. Their urban migration, progressively more towards Beirut, started only in the 1920s (Hillenkamp 2005: 217), accelerating significantly during the 1960s; and even more massively so during the civil war. The initial reason for this was the progressive rationalization of agriculture (Traboulsi 2007: 159ff.) and later, after the foundation of the state of Israel, increasing occurrence of violence (especially in the South), prompting displacement. By the beginning of the civil war therefore, there was already a significant

number of Shia living in Beirut and its suburbs.<sup>71</sup> As with other newly urban populations (such as the Maronites), the governance of the Shia community however had not yet caught up with this new situation. The political representation of the Shia, as (a Lebanese sectarian) community, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is in fact much more in flux than in Johnson's 'paradigmatic' Sunni (urban) case, where merchant notable families had already achieved some measure of crystallization of the administration of the community by the time of Independence (1943). Such was not the case for the Shia. One problem for the notable Shia families, based in rural areas, was that they were unable to keep track of (many) people once they migrated to the city (cf. Shanahan 2011: 73; Hillenkamp 2005: 219f.; Hanf 1995: 85), even though they remained registered as voters in their villages. The playing field in the capital therefore lay open to alternative political leadership. By 1975, a number of actors had made inroads into these urban communities. The Communist Party had won some souls; for the Shia living in the east-Beirut, some relations had developed (mostly by intellectuals) with the Phalange party and other parties that mainly serviced other sects; some of the religious organizations (such as Fadlallah's, already on his way to become Lebanon's most prominent Shia cleric), as well as the well-off Beydoun family (originally from Damascus, now settled in Beirut), who all had set up charity institutions; and last but not least, the imam Musa Sadr had become a serious player in the city as well (cf. Fawaz 2009: 209; Johnson 1986: 149; cf. Shanahan 2005, esp. Chapter 4). Musa Sadr was a cleric raised and trained in Iraq and Iran, but of Lebanese origins and assigned to Lebanon in 1959, who by the early 1970s had come to form the main challenge to the power of the Shia notable families, capitalizing on the incipient erosion of the latter's power bases. Besides charity, financed mostly by expatriate money, one way of further side-lining the notable politicians was to set up an alternative institutional structure of access to the state, which could funnel more resources to the Shia community, independent of older patronage relations (the 1970 foundation Higher Council of the South is the prime example of that). The importance of Sadr's status was proven in the first year of the war, when he was able to negotiate a peaceful departure of the Shia from the Nabaa suburb, after the Phalange militia decided to expulse all Muslims from east Beirut. Yet despite all these developments, no institutional web

71 Traboulsi (2007: 162) estimates that by the 1970s, over only three decades, the Shia community had become in majority (three quarters) urban. Thus, Beirut's eastern working-class suburbs alone were home to 250,000 Shia. Salim Nasr estimated the total Beirut Shia population at 750,000, or at 30% of the total metropolitan population (cited in Hillenkamp 2005: 218).



of actors had crystallized like they had in the Sunni case, nor had a univocal narrative – tied to the agendas of different political (and religious) actors – emerged about the place of Shia in the Lebanese nation. The civil war would be a period in which both these aspects of ‘Shia politicization’ entered a new phase.

**Rise of the militia men as new power-brokers** The situation that Johnson describes stems from the pre-war period. Johnson, himself writing in the early 1980s, sketches the breakdown of this political system among the Sunna leading up to and during the first years of the war. The ‘old’ political leaders failed to prevent war (which ran clearly against their interests as capitalist rentiers and entrepreneurs) and subsequently lost authority among their constituencies as new kinds of power were (perceived to be) required in unpredictable and violent circumstances. One consequence was that the ties between qabaday and za’im were severed. Some qabadays attained autonomy from their former protectors and gathered their own following, rather than acting merely as go-betweens between leader and people. Others allied themselves to the new military forces in the city, the ‘militias’. (This is also tied to a breakdown of state functions. Even if the state never stopped performing its functions completely, notably security was largely wrested from its hands and with that, from of the hands of the za’ims, who previously acted as guardians of the qabadays through their ties to the state, including its disciplinary institutions.)

For the Sunna the system of governance effectively fell apart. In fact, it instigated the decline of Sunni power in Beirut in general. During the civil war, the only Sunni power of some importance had been the Mourabitoun militia, which had grown around one of the leading qabadays in Saeb Salem’s old network (Salem had been one of the most important Sunni notables pre-war, and the instigator of the 1958 Sunni uprising, briefly mentioned in chapter 2). However, even the Mourabitoun were unable to stand up against the much better financed and organized Druze and the Shia armies that wound up taking over Beirut. For the Shia, however, the war heralded a new logic of governance. One of these well-financed Shia armies was Amal, the militia that Musa Sadr had founded<sup>72</sup>, realizing that political negotiations alone would no longer ensure the advancement of the Shia community. It achieved near hegemony over the Shia areas over

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72 While it is commonly phrased as the “military wing” of Sadr’s political movement, the Movement of the Disinherited, Gharbieh 2010) argues that, in fact, these need to be seen as two separate organizations set up for different purposes.

time, until it was challenged towards the end of the war by its splinter movement Hizbullah. Both parties developed relatively elaborate social service programs, but Amal, following Sadr's original political vision of political and civil integration of the Shia into the state and nation, was always oriented toward direct political representation and increasing services to Shia regions and communities through the state. Hizbullah on the other hand started out with the a strong non-state or anti-state position and correspondingly developed an autonomous service provision program. (Hizbullah also had Iranian money to do so. Amal didn't.) The logic of both institutional set-ups are different and become apparent in the post-war period. For the moment though, we may note that individuals employed in the military wings of political movements (though these two are not always clearly distinguishable) became the passage points to institutional support in people's daily lives.

Such 'militia men' therefore became the new strongmen in this constellation – considered thugs by some, heroes by others. Their function was in fact not unlike that of the qabaday of old. A good example is Abu Zalem, introduced in the previous chapter, whom some considered as *the* big man of Khandaq.<sup>73</sup> "He controls the entire area here", as some of the men and boys close to him assured me, a number of times (consequently, should I ever get into a pickle in the neighbourhood, all I would need to say is that I was with Abu Zalem). A native of Khandaq, Abu Zalem applied for a place in the "intellectual" militia of the Iraqi Baath party before the beginning of the 1975-'76 war and soon after worked himself up to commander. As commander he came to lead the Beiruti division of the Baath army, which until 1982, at least according to his own assessment, was one of the strongest in the city (as there is very little written about that militia, I can provide no independent assessment of that claim). After the 1982 Israeli invasion though, the fortunes of the Iraqi Baath changed as the rival Syrian Baath and its army was able to increase its influence, partly through the enlistment of the Amal militia and the Druze socialists. The Iraqi Baath was basically wiped out and Abu Zalem had to go underground, as he was 'wanted' by the Syrians. After the war, perhaps in order to safely resurface and resettle in Beirut with the Syrian army still present in Lebanon, he joined Hizbullah (supported by Syria) – a transition of political home that was all but easy, to his own admission.

73 As indicated previously, people resisted the idea of categorizing Abu Zalem as a qabaday, though. Abu Zalem himself merely smiled when I suggested the link. The qabaday is seen as something of the past, a figure of tradition. Abu Zalem is a part of Hizbullah, the force of Shia modernity in Lebanon.

Hizbullah asked him to recruit and train young men from Khandaq and elsewhere for the Resistance. From this position, he created a small yellow Hizbullah island in a sea of green Amal posters and graffiti that dominates the landscape of the neighbourhood.

People come to his island for a range of issues; he helps out people financially, whether directly (he receives some funds for this work) or by hooking up the person to a charity organization, landing them jobs, or finding a residence; resolving conflicts with security officials (police, internal security, army) and settling marital disputes; he had a clean-water tank installed, holds a daily audience during after-working hours (though it's mostly the same group that comes); and he has organized the military defence of the neighbourhood, which he would be best positioned to do, given his experience, his trained men and the infrastructural back-up Hizbullah offers (and which Amal lacks)<sup>74</sup>. Abu Zalem is able to perform such functions thanks to a combination of a wide social network (partly built up during the war years, partly through Hizbullah's extensive organizational network) and his status as representative of one of the most powerful political forces in the country.

Above, I questioned the relation between the function of qabaday and that of the mukhtar in the pre-war constellation of clientelist governance. This question returns all the more urgently in this post-war constellation. In the literature about the mukhtar, he is seen as a key figure in the competition between locally powerful families and the central state. However, none of the authors conceptualize or show quite clearly how locally powerful families could actually be allied to the political actors who had captured strategic positions in the central government and state bureaucracy (or even *be* the very same actor). Johnson examined precisely such a case, where a political boss like Saeb Salem was both an MP and minister as well as a local leader in his Beirut district. Ironically, in this constellation Johnson does not single out the role of the mukhtar but that of the qabaday. How does this play out in contemporary Khandaq? If one would ask Abu Zalem (which I did), the answer would be clear and rather blunt (it was): "The mukhtar, we [i.e. Hizbullah] put him in place [*minjibu*]. The party puts the mukhtar there. He's not *in* the party, but the party brings him and makes him a mukhtar." How does such a statement reflect relations between constituency, political leadership and the state?

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74 One presumes someone like him also plays a role in putting people – people who do not otherwise have the right connections – into contact with other party members at positions in the administration that allow them to allocate funds, employ people and expedite paperwork, but I have never encountered examples of such references during my fieldwork (which does not necessarily mean anything).

### **Local statehood in Khandaq: the mukhtar between community steward and party bureaucrat**

When I related Abu Zalem's viewpoint to mukhtar Makki, he thought (of course) it was nonsense. Yet, Abu Zalem no more than reiterated Makki's own narrative about what has happened to the mukhtar's office. Both his references to his father's days of being a mukhtar as his explanation of how the electoral process had changed since 1998 are permeated with a nostalgic sense of decline – a decline from a period when the mukhtar still amounted to something to one in which he has become near irrelevant. In his father's days, ministers paid due respect to the mukhtars, who were important for their votes; state resources had not been completely monopolized by 'political parties', so the mukhtar was able to pull strings to get members of their constituencies a job or other state-based resources<sup>75</sup>; and people would come to them to address their (financial and social) issues, putting faith in the authority of the mukhtar to solve problems. As regards the local elections, he explained his power relative the party's was still strong in 1998, whereas he intimated that parties in 2010 were much more autonomous in their decision-making and scope for action (having built up strong election machines).

Such a narrative of the decline of the mukhtar resonates in fact with much older ones. In the writings on the topic between the 1960s and 1980s, authors consistently signal that while the mukhtar, as traditional community elder (note how an instrument of modernization now becomes a vestige of tradition), 'still' had some influence and prestige, his authority had succumbed to erosion by various kinds of processes of modernization. Among the forces of modernization are the changing nature of the state, the democratization of education (especially relevant for mukhtars in the village), and the emergence of new centres of political power, such as social movement and political parties.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Peteet, in her study of conflict resolution in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, draws attention to the "serious challenge" to "the traditional bases of authority – landownership, age, prestige, arbitration skills" coming from "the cadres of the

75 It is unlikely though that such resources, especially precious ones like jobs, would have been mediated on the mukhtar's authority alone. Undoubtedly the mukhtar would have been the middleman, advocating the case of one of the residents with a political boss, in Makki's father's case most likely Rachid Beydoun.

76 We can find the same type of argument for another ("traditional") figure of power of the locality, the qabaday (the strongman, see below for discussion), who did not manage to 'survive' the onslaught of modernity between the 1920s and '50s (Khouri 1984). By working with such broad categories like tradition and modernity, they appear not to see the innovations the office of the mukhtar or the position of the qabaday can undergo, from within 'modern' configurations.

national movement, often educated young people who came to occupy politically influential positions" (1987: 7f.). Migdal (1980) cites a host of reasons for the declining influence of the (*village*) mukhtar in Palestine, including his marginality from Israeli state bureaucracy, or the fact that youngsters were making more than him with low-skilled labour in Israel (though Migdal admits arbitration skills still counted for something). Baer (1980) adds that the new administrative context (incorporation into Israeli bureaucratic structures) also deprived him of sources of personal profit, in managing money streams from state to community or citizen.<sup>77</sup> Abu Zalem (unsurprisingly) also reiterates the decline of the mukhtar. Asking the rhetorical question of who, besides the party, is important in the neighbourhood, he proceeded to answer: "Not the mukhtars. The mukhtar is a nobody. I solve the mukhtar's problems. He comes to me and I solve his problem for him". After the party puts him in place, "he can't do anything. He doesn't have any power (*ṣalāḥiyya*)."<sup>78</sup> The power he referred to are the kinds of connections one has to have in order to intervene in various social, legal and state affairs and thus "solve problems". The businessman who had explained why Makki had been excluded, sketched a similar balance of power between the party and the mukhtar. He had in fact wanted to run himself, not because he needed the job, but as an extension of the services he already provided as a wealthy man (and, as he boasted at one point, to "break" the Shia parties). However, when he announced his candidacy, Hizbullah and Amal came to him, "and I didn't want to make an alliance with them. To join their joint list. It was better for them if I was with them instead of against them – because I would make an impact on [the election results] [*li'anno bi'assir `aleyhun*]" (interview Ammar, October 2011). He intimated that perhaps they would have turned to aggression if he did decide to run by himself, but ultimately he settled on the following explanation for what he decided to do, that is, to retract his candidacy:

Ammar: I have work, I have interests. I can't be a mukhtar. I have customers from Hizbullah and Amal, and the [Lebanese] Forces, the Socialists and Nationalists, Wahabis – they all distribute through me, all the parties. Sadr, Fadlallah's, the institutions of the Patriarch,

<sup>77</sup> At the same time, though, he notes that with the tighter integration into state and national economy comes the increasing need for "all kinds of documents", for which the mukhtar serves as the source (1980: 123). Whether this would add to his individual power (as Baer hypothesizes) or not, this point is worth keeping in mind because it alerts us to the structural mediating function the mukhtar continues to fulfil, even with the loss of personal charisma.

Maronites – I can't stand with one group against another [*šuff ma` fi'a dūdd ukhra*]. I distribute newspapers for the opposition and [the government]. Take [the newspapers] *Mustaqbal* – which is Hariri's – and *Akhbar* [left-leaning 'opposition' newspaper] – they're against each other, so I can't be with either. It's just "business", that's how I walk.

MB: So you can't be mukhtar without being on the list and you can't be on the list?

Ammar: Right, the situation doesn't allow it.

In other words, parties take precedence over local eminence and stewardship to the community – the role of the 'traditional' mukhtar. To give one last example, when I conducted an interview at the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) about the local elections, my interviewee exclaimed at one point, only half facetiously, 'who cares about the mukhtar anymore? Only you care about the mukhtar!' But in fact, as mukhtar Makki acutely experienced (and as my LADE interviewee also acknowledged), political parties care a good deal about the mukhtar.

There are therefore both scholarly and popular discourses that would disqualify the mukhtar as not very interesting. That presents something of a puzzle. Were mukhtar a nobody, whence the meddling by political parties in their election? The businessman and once mukhtar- hopeful had already given the first hint of the answer at the beginning of the chapter: the mukhtar has to play a role in the electoral machine of the political party. The issue is not so much that the mukhtar has to bring his own votes to the local election – as explained, the parties depend on the list as a whole, not so much on the individuals on it. Mukhtars are however useful for a number of other reasons – most of which have to do with the national elections instead – which explains why Amal finally joined the 'unity list' of 2010. It was previously agreed that Amal, instead of Hizbullah, would get the one Beiruti Shia seat for the opposition in Parliament<sup>78</sup>. In order to provide support for that candidate, Amal was in need of a mukhtar, so Makki himself explained. (Support he seemingly wasn't willing to provide.)

What is the role of mukhtar in the national electoral process? First of all, mukhtars, as persons with a certain social standing, hold events during which the constituency can meet a candidate MP. Secondly and more importantly, however, is knowledge about that constituency. Already

78 In an exchange for a seat in a district south of Beirut, Baabda, for the Christian ally in the 'opposition block', the Free Patriotic Movement. (An-Nahar, 2009-04-08)

back in Ottoman days, when the office of the mukhtar was first introduced, providing information about local affairs was one of the primary expectations of the mukhtar – as the LADE interviewee put it, the Empire needed a “spy” – and he added, that hasn’t necessarily changed much. The mukhtar is still one of those best placed in producing knowledge about the neighbourhood – both in terms of relatively prominent social position and the records that he is professionally bound to keep. Still more importantly, the mukhtar also has the competence of registering residents – and by implication – voters in the district. Not unsurprisingly, mukhtars have been accused of abusing this competence more than once – the most egregious case happening in 2009 when it became clear that almost 2,000 new residents had been registered – 99,99,% of which on the same address (Al-Akhbar, 2010-03-23, Rajana Hamyeh)<sup>79</sup>. Thus, not only does the mukhtar in some ways mediate the relation between party and constituency, he can at times constitute that very constituency. In other words, the mukhtar’s hands in state operations are quite precious<sup>80</sup>.

So we wind up with a somewhat complicated picture: on the one hand there’s no public recognition of the strategic value of the mukhtar, even though in point of fact, there certainly seems to be one. On a popular level, meanwhile, the strategic value of the mukhtar does not really appear to be an issue, whereas his role as community steward actually is. For while I have been implying that people in Lebanon and in Khandaq specifically relegate the mukhtar to a traditional past, this is in fact not entirely accurate. A case could be made that ordinary people do see his office – in part at least – as ‘traditional’, but that doesn’t mean it also counts as the past for them. He is still seen as someone who *should* have a certain standing in the community, a standing that comes with certain responsibilities. Makki emphasized this aspect of mukhtarship, in the way he talked about his own office as of that of his father, which he sought to emulate. To Makki, his father the mukhtar was an ‘elder’, to whom people would turn with all sorts of problems. That is what any mukhtar should also aspire to be. Now, one might say that perhaps he emphasized this aspect because his standing was all that was left, not having lived up to other expectations attached to the position. Yet such a normative discourse of

79 These new ‘members’ of the neighborhood were of good help in slowly closing the gap between the number of registered Shia and Sunni voters, alluded to above. According to Makki, the new ‘residents’ were part of an attempt to redraw the balance of mukhtars between Sunna and Shia from 4-6 to an equal split.

80 The fact that most of the mukhtars (that I spoke to) in fact had had careers in state institutions before (in security, or personal status administration) suggests the candidates were also selected for their capacity to put those mukhtar hands in the state to good use.

service is actually quite strong and pervasive – *all* mukhtars as well as residents make use of it. Thus, in spite of the wide-spread narrative of the decline of the mukhtar, he is still held up to the old ‘traditional’ standards of community service<sup>81</sup>. However, and this complicates matters, mukhtars are also constantly berated and derided for not living up to the standard of the community steward. Why that would be and what that means for residents takes us into next chapter’s territory. To conclude this one, we can at least sum up what we’ve learned about the position of the mukhtar, in relation to political leadership, its constituency and the state.

**State authority, the mukhtar and local political powers** I have attempted to capture a part of a complex and shifting set of actors and mediating relations. We have the state, understood as the different institutions that can make things possible for citizens, which regulate transactions between them, and provide important resources like jobs. We have the political actors, which often actually serve as a ‘gateway’ to the state. These political actors have changed over time, from the ‘shaykh’ and the za’im, as heads of important families, to the political parties and movements who at times replaced the notable families, at times incorporated them (in the case of Amal and Hizbullah they have replaced earlier notable Shia families). Then there are citizens who are the third party in this constellation. The three ‘parties’ are tied to each through an array of intermediary ‘institutions’, such as the mukhtar and the ‘qabaday’ or big man<sup>82</sup>, who have separate identities and roles, yet similar functions that sometimes overlap, sometimes alternate.

At its origin, the office of the mukhtar was supposed to mediate the authority of the central (imperial) state at the local level. Accounts differ as to the details of what authority and how to mediate, as well as in competition with which non-state authority. For Baer, and others following him, the mukhtar was an instrument of maintaining social order, an order that was often against the wishes and control mechanisms of the ‘chiefs’ of dominant families or clans. As Mundy (2000) notes, it is not entirely clear who these chiefs were and why they would be considered a problem (though the sweeping reform of the taxation regime might be one indication, as the ‘shaykhs’ were often tax collectors), but the amount of legislation, both by the Ottomans and later the British and Jordanians (as well

81 In contrast to the qabaday, whose ‘traditional’ role people seem to consider not of this time anymore. Cf. note *supra*.

82 As well as others that I haven’t talked about like the so-called ‘election keys’: “key” individuals (very punny) in the party’s local election machine.



as to a lesser extent the French), targeted at these functions does suggest a strong desire to gain sovereignty over the territory. For Murad and, at least implicitly, for Mundy, the mukhtar played a crucial role in mediating expanding access of capital to real estate especially, by freeing up land. (In so doing he progressively took up the role of an entrepreneur.) In a different way, the mukhtar mediated 'state and society' by serving as the channel through which demands of the state linked up with needs of the citizens. Whether the state wanted something from the citizen (taxes, testimony in court) or citizens needed something from the state (a job, a permit), the mukhtar stood (and stands) in between. With that position also came opportunities for 'tailored' mediations, i.e. brokering individuals' connection to state resources, especially when some governments increased the mediating duties of the mukhtar. For instance, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the mukhtar was charged with the distribution of government aid, which, according to complaints lodged against mukhtars, were distributed according to, let's say, 'supplementary criteria' (Baer 1980). It remains unclear to me to which extent the mukhtar ever had 'connections', what people in Lebanon tend to refer to as "*wāṣṭa*" (in a usually disparaging manner), that would also enable them to tailor services. According to Makki, his father had 'real' connections, with high-level politicians, which would have left him some scope of action for him to, say, get people placed in state-bureaucratic positions. Makki's depiction of the past may well have been coloured by the fact he wasn't able to stand up against the political parties. At least we may observe that the *ṣalāḥiyya* of the mukhtar has transformed along with the shifts in the ideological and infrastructural make-up of state governance on the one hand, and non-state political figurations on the other.

Fairly quickly after its establishment, the mukhtar was recruited out of (or into) the local political elites – the 'notables', whether that be by virtue of the powers of his office, by virtue of his 'employment' by an important family, or whether because his incumbency in the office itself was the reflection of already being notable. All authors agree that mukhtars played an important social role, albeit in different ways and in varying degrees. The mukhtar was one of the go-to-guys, especially for problems that required conflict mediation (i.e. dispute settlement) as well as social capital. Again, it is not entirely clear to which extent the mukhtars in Khandaq may have played such a role. We have two situations to compare with 'the' village and pre-war 'Sunni Beirut'. In the village there would have been a greater overlap between the 'notables' and the mukhtar offices and therefore the mukhtar's position would have been invested with social influence. In Sunni Beirut, the big notables were differentiated

from the local notables, but they were nearby. People would go and petition the notable's office, through his contact person (the secretary or more often, the qabaday who could actually vet for the person in question), according to Johnson. However, in Shia Beirut, there were no traditional notable families before 1975 (with the possible exception of the Beydoun family). A family like Makki, which was relatively large and well-to-do within the Khandaq context, might well have played a bigger role than it would have in a different playing field. Arbitration between constituents, for example, would consequently have been part of his social role.

As noted, the 1975-'90 wars changed the playing field dramatically. It left the power of the old Sunni elite in Beirut and its system of control and support in ruins and the militias-cum-parties claimed the still open field of Shia sectarian governance. This catapulted a new kind of qabaday onto the scene, who had proven his valorous worth in battle during the war and was given the job of preserving social order on behalf of the party. Not all go-to-guys are of this kind, nor do they have to be: having the party behind one is already a powerful magnet (independent of individual reputation), whether for its state resources (especially though not exclusively Amal) or 'civil' resources (especially though not exclusively Hizbullah). These persons therefore took over many functions that might have been exercised by mukhtars in a previous era. They have become a social authority – as someone who 'solves your problem', for instance through arbitration – and have taken up the duty of tailored mediation, what the political scientific literature calls brokerage, between state and society.

The shift towards the party-big man nexus doesn't imply that the role of the mukhtar is played out, as the general discourse in Lebanon seems to suggest (the notion that 'being a mukhtar is merely a matter of status'). The office still mediates in particular ways state and society; it regulates many of citizens' everyday dealings with the state. In addition to this, to all appearances, they contribute also to the mediation of party and electorate. Firstly, by participating in the 'electoral machines', mobilizing people to the voting booths, and secondly, through their hand in the very constitution of who the electorate is (by changing the voter rolls, legally or illegally, licitly or illicitly). One might suggest that in this last sense, they also mediate the relation between party and state, as key actors that can preserve or enhance access of parties to the state, by creating more advantageous conditions for electoral success.

### 3

**Conclusion** In this chapter, I promised we would start to get a better sense of how Lebanon's sectarian system addresses its citizens as par-

ticular kinds of citizens, through the particular political relations ‘on the ground’. Let me now reiterate how more precisely. The ‘sectarian system’ works in part through (electoral) districts. The districts are ground for leading sectarian political powers to intervene closely in local politics, by participating in elections or controlling mechanisms of (in)formal governance. Elections are organized according to an old sectarian – or ‘consociational’ – principle of having members from different sectarian communities vote for each other’s representatives, forcing representatives from different sects to work in tandem. One outgrowth of that is the cooperation in lists. These lists, for which people are asked to vote in their entirety, fit well within a representative logic in which the gift is a central mechanism and metaphor. It helps sustain a particular kind of citizen-voter, the loyal voter, who enters into a social contract with his leadership. The connections that strongmen and mukhtars provide also play into such a political relation.

What does ‘situating’ the resident in such a web mean for the latter’s political imagination, and more specifically, for the kinds of ideas about and claims to citizenship that they formulate? There are three elements in this configuration of local power that seem relevant to this question. One more general element is that because of district politics, political parties are present in everyday spaces. One may therefore expect people to think and act from within a moral universe in which the political parties are a prominent fixture. A second, more specific element of the first, is that local party men assure some entry into the state as well as access to other kinds of resources (social and material capital), which puts “problem-solving power” on the agenda. At base, this is a question about sovereignty. Thirdly, then, the mukhtar has a dual position, both as a local state representative and, still, as an elder to the community. The imbrication of the two means that the office serves as a subject through which to explore and develop both notions of the (sectarian) community – that is, what moral ties exist between community and state – as well as of the authority and service of the state.

The following chapter explores how these general themes are worked out by the residents of the neighbourhood. That means that whereas so far I’ve contented myself to describe the features and occupants of the local political landscape, in the next chapter I blow these ‘figures’ to life and explore how the logic of these overlapping different formal and informal authorities works from day to day and how that is co-constitutive of a moral community, embedded in particular imaginations of what Lebanon has become.

## Chapter 4:

# "The state doesn't enter here": popular understandings of the political community and sovereignty

As announced at the end of the previous chapter, I descend from a bird's eye view of the neighbourhood's social and political relations and take us now into the ethnographic mud in order to consider public life in the neighbourhood from the perspective of these 'citizens', its residents. One thing that becomes immediately apparent, once one's boots are firmly planted in that proverbial mud, is that Khandaq is a 'popular' neighbourhood. Folks in Lebanon (and the Arab world over) have a word for that, which means exactly the same thing – 'of the people': *sha'bi*. The precise meaning depends a little bit on who's speaking. When someone who might consider him or herself of a certain standing uses it to refer to an area (it's usually a geographic qualification, though of course it speaks of the respective area's inhabitants), it's usually to say, almost apologetically though not necessarily disparagingly, that the people that live somewhere are merely 'simple' people – they have no pretence to high social status or professional occupations, they are not highly educated or wield significant political influence. If by contrast someone speaks who identifies more wholly with the *sha'bi* character of a neighbourhood, the accent shifts slightly from 'simple' to 'rough' and 'unpolished', like gems: the claim becomes somewhat more proud and (at least when voiced by men) at times boisterous. Both kinds of qualifications, each in its own way, also identifies the *sha'b* as good or pure, where people stick together and make up a family.

Many have qualified Khandaq to me as *sha`bi* as well and I would like to stick with that qualification because I believe it is a structuring principle in the way many residents perceive social and political realities in Lebanon. One could opt to go with the descriptor 'working-class' instead of 'popular', but it would not be quite as apt. For one, it belies the fact that not all of Khandaq is 'working-class' (though the majority is). But it would also not capture the feel and aesthetics of social life in the neighbourhood. Walking about its streets, you encounter a type of sociality that may well be tied to socio-economic positions but extends beyond that and persists even when individual residents reach more comfortable socio-economic conditions. Elements of that sociality include the predominance of the street (as site for socializing), the rough and tumble of male competitive sociality (as much about affection as it is about status), and the identification with the 'ordinary man' in everyday discussions. An example might illustrate how that sociality remains dominant, irrespective of one's own socio-economic rank. One of the richest men in the neighbourhood is Ragheb Ammar. He has created, and remains the head of, three companies for the distribution of newspapers and magazines in Lebanon and the Middle-Eastern region. His offices and storage spaces have slowly taken over an entire street, the street where he grew up and where his father used to have a grocery store. His children go to a premier private French-language school. Yet his daily social network is limited to his brothers – who have also been inducted into the enterprise – a few close (former) employees and a number of men he got to know on the seaside boulevard where they go to swim every morning. On the boulevard he's considered the 'captain' of his little Khandaq gang, and there's a lot of physical jostling, recurrent fart jokes (and some sex jokes, but never performed too ostentatiously, because they are immediately reprimanded as unworthy of a self-respecting Muslim), backgammon games and shouting at high volume. One time, Ragheb had an appointment in town and had clothed himself for the occasion in a two-piece suit that was a kind of a glossy mauve and a little large for him. As I passed him on the street I (somewhat facetiously) complimented him on his fancy appearance. Ragheb, ordinarily loud, rowdy and even intimidating, turned almost shy and managed only to produce a sheepish smile in response. Retrospectively, I felt that he was somewhat 'out of his element', a feeling later corroborated by a remark of a daily observer of the goings-on in Ragheb's street. We were talking about my visit to the theatre the night before. He compared my 'culture' with the world of Khandaq. *Take Ragheb, bless his heart, he never grew with his income. He would be lost outside Khandaq. He can't go to fancy business lunches, or out with your friends,*

*say to the theatre. Imagine if the conversation suddenly turned to English<sup>83</sup>, he wouldn't be able to follow! He's not learned or sophisticated. He simply can't function at that level.*

I've dwelt on this 'popular' character of the neighbourhood because the self-identification of being '*sha`bi*', rooted in these daily practices of sociability, is indicative of a broader pattern of how people in Khandaq tend to relate to the Lebanese polity and position themselves in its public debates. I would argue that the 'ordinary man' is the character Khandaq residents most frequently assume. Put differently, the ordinary man is a kind of subject position that people inhabit and from which current events and political claims are evaluated. In the first half of this chapter I show such evaluations in relation to the 'State' (capital S as in: the idea of the state) and to (confessional) political leadership. These evaluations are entangled with people's relations to and ideas about the 'figures' outlined in the previous chapter. The mukhtar is a face of state, whereas the neighbourhood strongman acts as a stand-in for the political party. They therefore become part of people's thinking about these grander entities. The ethnographic argument for this first part is that while people in different ways certainly demonstrate support for and alignment with each of these actors and ideas they represent, they also retain a critical distance, a critique rooted in the identification with the ordinary. In the second half of the chapter, I argue that this ambivalence allows us to critically examine recent Deleuze-inspired conceptualizations of state-citizen relations.

**The imagination of the "translocal" state: appeal and disengagement** In exploring the discursive stances that people take towards current issues, contentious social entities in Lebanon such as 'the state', or known political and communitarian figures I adopt the methodological principle that guides Gupta's (1995) article on 'discourses of corruption' in rural India. Gupta assumes that the way people think about the (national) state will not only be influenced by mediatic discourses in newspapers and television where they could find opinions about such issues as corruption on the highest levels of the nation's government, but also on their own experience with 'the state' on local levels. In fact, Gupta proposes, people interpret and appropriate those more widely circulating opinions and analyses of the national government and top-

83 Code-switching between Arabic, English and/or French is frequent among the highly educated. Knowing (any of) these two languages is an important marker of development and status, and is often invoked as a national quality ('Lebanese know all the languages'). This is also a reason why Ragheb's children go to the French-language school.

level bureaucrats *on the basis* of these latter real-life experiences. Given the visceral primacy of interactions with real-life people (local bureaucrats), about personally consequential issues (household budgets, for instance), over the reception of mediatic discourse, and undoubtedly mindful of the symbolic interactionists' insistence that meaning and social order emerge out of the interactional order, Gupta's analytic premise seems almost unavoidable – certainly in those cases of remote rural life where people's *only* embodied interaction with, and knowledge of, the state is the local state. While in Khandaq, both physical and social distance to higher-level bureaucrats and politicians are far less insuperable, the fact remains that the vast majority of people's interactions with state and politics occurs through local instantiations and lower-level bureaucrats. As an analytical starting point, we may assume that these interactions inform people's understanding of social entities otherwise known primarily through (mediatised) discourse – and vice versa.

Before moving on to the actual analysis however, we need to discuss two caveats. One is conceptual, the other methodological. To start with the first, Gupta's emphasis is on how local interactions enable the “discursive construction” of the translocal state.<sup>84</sup> It is, he asserts, “through the practices of such local institutions [like headmen, the police, or the Block Development Office] that a translocal institution such as the state comes to be imagined” (1995: 384). Therefore, “all constructions of the state have to be situated with respect to the location [and, he emphasizes elsewhere, the experience] of the speaker” (id.: 390). Gupta appears to be making a strong claim about the *necessity* of situated interaction and experience with local instantiations of the State (capital S) for people to interpret more broadly circulating discourses about what that State is like (in his case, “corrupt”). If this reading is correct, I propose we trade that strong claim for a weak one – a claim that more modestly submits that there is some dialectic between translocal discourses, on the one hand, and local experiences and discourses on the other (without positing causal prerequisites or functional requirements). That is at least the analytical assumption I proceed with. That brings us to the second caveat, the methodological one.

In order to demonstrate there's a dialectic between translocal and local discourses Gupta needs to show firstly the link between those two discourse (between how political parties and journalists talk about corrup-

84 Though he (obviously) recognizes the reverse as well, for instance when he draws attention to how (translocal) “linkages [such as austerity policies in response to global restructuring of the economy] may have structuring effects that may overdetermine the ['local'] contexts in which daily practices are carried out” (id.: 377). His emphasis, especially when it comes to the circulation of discourses, is on the reverse direction, though.

tion at the top and “the subaltern” talk about corrupt bureaucrats at street level) and secondly between local experiences and the local discourse (between trying to get things done through locally accessible bureaucrats and talk of the corruption of the state). Overall he does a reasonably adequate job for the second task but fares quite poorly on the first account. Ironically, in this clearest example of how ordinary people re-interpret translocal discourses (his first task), he precisely omits data of the experiential basis for such re-interpretation (the second task). Towards the end of the article he introduces Ram Singh, a sympathizer of the Congress Party. He favours this party because it has a strong stance on corruption. Singh believes in the party’s stance, because it corresponds to his ‘experience’ or ‘reality’ that one can always seek “redressals for grievances” and “[punishment of] local officials” by going to more highly placed officials, such as MPs, who often happen to belong to the Congress Party. The argument itself would be fine – official, mediatic discourse (the Congress Party line) and local imagination of the state (corruption can be fought) are linked through embodied experience (seeking redress) – except that the experience remains entirely hypothetical to the reader as it is not part of Gupta’s ethnographic record.

My intention is not to bash Gupta, precisely because I am acutely aware of how difficult it is to make the full argument. I will try to – like Gupta tried to – show that people’s ideas about the Lebanese state and political leadership bounce off both mediatic discourse about these notions, and interactions with and talk of local formal, sort of formal and not so formal authorities. Showing that requires one to hold a number of ethnographic balls in the air. Firstly, I would have to – like Gupta had to – show practices on the one hand (interactions with local bureaucrats) and discourse on the other (how they talk about those bureaucrats and about the state in general). In my data, those are mostly the same, because most of the data consist of *speech about* such practices. For this kind of argument, that’s obviously problematic. Secondly, in terms of showing the links between two ‘levels’ of discourse (mediatised and embodied), I have recorded few moments where both discursive levels were present. Therefore, when I argue people re-interpret mediatic discourse according to lived experiences, the argument will have to be somewhat stipulative. I therefore juxtapose discourse from non-local sources and general complaints about the state on the one hand with references to and about the state’s representatives in Khandaq on the other. While stipulatory, I hope the reader will find the links to be plausible and recognize at very least point the value of understanding imaginaries of the social and the political as coming from a “particular position” (id.).



**Mukhtars and the neglectful state** Recall from the previous chapter that the figure of the mukhtar is embedded in a strong normative discourse of communal stewardship – a discourse that both mukhtars themselves and residents employ, albeit it with different valuations: mukhtars take up the position of community steward, residents tend to dislodge them from that noble throne. Stewardship can be practiced in a number of ways. One is through financial assistance. Ragheb, the successful businessman who wanted to run for mukhtar, already claimed he wouldn't have asked for any fees whatsoever – since he didn't need the office as a business. But the incumbent mukhtars themselves also emphasize this aspect of their work. All claim that they reduce fees or perform services at no cost to those who would not be able to afford it. Of course, there are *other* mukhtars who do not follow this example, but, as one mukhtar, Kabbani, put it, certainly “there *are* correct mukhtars”, like himself (interview February 2012).

Another way of serving the community is solving disruptions to public order or ending conflict, often involving (small amounts of) money to smooth things over. The new mukhtar Baydoun, who replaced mukhtar Makki, explains:

If a problem between youngsters happens, we can step in, and [they're like], ‘yes mukhtar, at your service mukhtar,’ and we can solve [the problem] for them. So if they have a conflict over a motorcycle or 100 dollars, the mukhtar pays it from his pocket. Here's a dollar, ok folks, forget about it. This happens, yes. These simple problems, we can solve them [...] Sometimes they don't even accept the money when they see you're ready to pay and solve the problem. ‘Never mind, it's fine’ [they'll say].

And people respect you more for it. As a representative of the state. That's what I am here in the area. I'm a part of the state. So people respect you, they know if I petitioned the police, they will come down for patrol (*dawriya*) to me. Firstly, they respect you, secondly, they fear you because they know that if you show them your strength (*tikza`ran ma`on*), you can hurt them with the help of the state, if you complain about them, you can put them in prison. (Interview February 2012)

These are of course *discursive constructions* of the ‘steward-mukhtar’ and must be taken thus – as much as accounts of actual events that have occurred. In that context it is perhaps interesting that one often mentioned example of conflict resolution is that of marital dispute. While it does happen, its frequency in self-representative discourse is perhaps more due to

the symbolically important link between the family and the (reproduction of the) community, of which the steward-mukhtar figures himself a guardian. As mentioned previously however, people often challenge this representation of the mukhtar. Mukhtars who help out people financially by reducing fees? Residents paint pictures of those same mukhtars as cunning (*bandū'*) merchants who swindle poor people with fees that are too high. One day I was sitting in one of the offices in Ragheb's distribution company, where Ragheb's personal circle often comes to relax. One of his friends and relation by marriage told me:

"The mukhtar – he's a thief; he gives no respect and gets no respect. There's a big difference though between the mukhtar here and back in the village. In village you have someone old (*kbīr*) and he will hit you when you try to pay, here the mukhtar hits you when you don't!<sup>85</sup> And he'll ask [LL]15,000 also, even if it only costs 5,000."

One of Ragheb's brothers added: "Here", in the city he means, "it's simply a *maslaḥa*". *Maslaḥa* is the word for both 'profession' (a source of income) and 'interest'.

While the monetary interests were one problem with the contemporary mukhtar, a different issue that was also brought up, is the independence of the mukhtar – an independence that was discursively tied to his willingness to act in the interest of the community. Ragheb's friends and family basically argued that it's difficult to become a mukhtar without having special relations first (with parties or within the state). They recounted Ragheb's fate when he had intended to run for mukhtar. Because Ragheb did not want to work for any of the parties, as a certain point he was threatened by gangs (*'isabāt*). "They didn't want an independent person. Then they think you're *against* them". Interestingly, they followed up on this claim by pointing out that, if Ragheb would have been elected, *he* would have given his services for free. The smooth segue suggests that the themes of independence and service lie closely together.

At this point, it's important to point to some striking similarities between the things people say about 'the' state in Lebanon and what they have to say about the mukhtar. One is the tension between 'service' and 'inter-

85 Incidentally, this is what precisely happened with mukhtar Baydoun. There was a man who came to ask for some affidavit and asked what he needed to pay. Baydoun's initial reaction was "Oh, whatever you want [to pay]!", which is a polite phrase often used by vendors. "No tell me," the man repeated his question. Baydoun: "Whatever you want!" So the man pays him 5,000LL, which gets Baydoun into a fit. He shouts at him: "That doesn't cover it! The price is 15,000! What, am I running a charity here?!"

est' that came up here, which perhaps serves as umbrella complaint for others. However, let me specify some other convergences. What follows is an almost random selection of the numerous (innumerable) examples of 'state talk'. Jammal, the proprietor of the excellent but humble *fūl* cafeteria, was preparing me my plate, while the radio was on. The talk show host reviewed a recent dispute between two politicians. Jammal provided running commentary of the show to me, the foreigner, and explained that, contrary to what you might think, given the country's civil war, religion was never Lebanon's problem. People lived and live side by side. But politicians *were* a problem: because *they* were corrupt, basic provisions or safety nets were never built (i.e. goods for and of the general public), which made the country unstable. This is even more true since the war – the youth who have grown up after it never experienced a real state, since post-war politicians did nothing to rebuild what 'proper state' there was before. Later in the show, the radio show moved on to talk about the Minister of Interior, Ziad Baroud, a younger politician, who was widely considered to be untarnished with (i.e., uncorrupted by) a war history. Hopes for his Ministry were therefore all the higher as well. Jammal continued his commentary: *they shouldn't be so hard on him [Baroud]. He wants to, but they won't let him. This is the thing with politicians here. They're all talk, but no action. It's as if I were to say to you: 'Oh Marten, how fond I am of you' but then not give you your fūl. [Words are nothing, in other words.] You have to feel it through your mouth, in your belly. No, politics doesn't mean anything here on the ground ('ala al-arḍ).*

In the same vein, one of the glass workers who work on 'Ragheb's street' wanted to get the record straight for me, as he and others were talking politics over early morning coffee. *The Lebanese people aren't bad, he started out, the problem is thieving politicians. Take this latest little storm over at the Prime Minister's. The (Sunni) Prime Minister had apparently been trying to place a matter<sup>86</sup> under his authority rather than under the then competent Minister. Why? Just so that it would always be under Sunni control from then on (as tradition, and subsequent ratifications, dictates that the PM be Sunni). That sectarian system is a problem. Not because of the sects themselves (though the bigger do tend to eat the smaller, it has to be said), but the sectarian system makes it easy for politicians to get their hands on 'the state' in order to steal and fill their pockets. And if they get called on it, they can always hide behind their sect.* The underlying preoccupation with the (cornered) common good also comes out in the following example. One sunny day in mid-April 2010, I was walking to catch a guided tour of the neighbourhood adja-

86 The details escaped me by the time I wrote down my fieldnotes. Mea culpa.

cent to Khandaq, Zoqaq al-Blat. In the following chapters, I speak more of both the tour, the larger project in which it was embedded as well as the neighbourhood; suffice it to say here that it came from an attempt to put the neighbourhood on people's mental maps of their city and hopefully mobilize greater attention and concern for the fate of its patrimonial architecture. (That fate seemed like a rather dire one, with protections being reduced and circumvented as developers' pressure to build towers from scratch mounted with the steep rise of real-estate prices.) On my way to the tour, I passed by an 'Ashura tent' – a small construction of wooden stilts and black cloth, where people can get complimentary tea during the 10-day holiday of Ashura. Ashura had long past, however, so I inquired with the gentlemen present as to why it was still there. I was promptly offered some tea and we got to talking. The conversation soon touched the state of the old buildings – perhaps because they had seen flyers for the tour, or they figured I'd be interested as a foreigner. They weren't very happy about their present condition. *The state should do something about that*, one said. *Such a shame, look at this palace* – pointing to a dilapidated but still intact mansion just across the street – *it's still from the Turkish [Ottoman] time, but it's empty. There were many like that here, beautiful constructions, with gardens you could play in, but they have already disappeared. This one will disappear too. Shame, the state should preserve and renovate them. Instead, people do what they want.*

In reference to the same topic and concern – the fate of 'old Beirut' – I spoke to the director of an NGO that seeks to improve the quality of life and the environment in the 'traditional' neighbourhood of Gemmayze, in east-Beirut. He saw the area transform, as three-storey building after three-storey building goes down to make room for residential towers. He also mused over the same quandary: why does the state not impose limits on private interests? Yes, the neighbourhood offers investment opportunities, but "where are the rules? Where is the general plan? Sure, the financial interests of property owners are important, but that's why the state should establish the norms. [...] There are no excuses anymore, that we have to accept irregularities because, 'well, the situation is still not normal, what with the history of civil war and all'. The state should respond to the demands of the residents." (Interview July 2009)

While the director still professed hope for the state – they do work together with the municipality, and the latter does have the required competences, so it should just get its act together – many saw little ground for redemption. Like most people, I sometimes struck up a conversation with the drivers of the minivans that operate as private buses, picking up folks on pre-ordained routes. Perhaps it's the practice of going through the

same conversational motions again and again, but they have a certain talent for the formulaic condensation of popular truths. Thus, one 'Van no. 4' driver, after complaining about a fine that he had had to pay for no reason if not corruption, summarized, angrily: *In Lebanon, it's the state violates that the citizen, not the citizen the law!* Another driver, a few days later, rattled on about the same, familiar themes of the failed (because corrupt) state, of thievery in the name of sectarianism, but finished off with an eloquent statement of how bad things really are. *You know, it's the crooks on top and the good people on the bottom. And the crooks will not let the people stand!* (mā byikhallu yi'ūm) Two weeks later, I was having a longer chat in Van 4, sitting next to a friendly and soft-spoken driver. The traffic flow stopped rather abruptly at a major U-turn. *That's probably because someone tried to cross, jamming the traffic*, the driver commented. He then used that as a parable for the situation the whole country was in. He quoted Ziad Baroud, the technocrat Minister with a preceding 'career' in civil society (*Ziad and I, we're big buddies*, he joked). Apparently, Baroud recently commented that the country was in a ditch (or hole: *jūra*) and that we need to find a way out. *But how to find a way out if there's no order* (like people randomly crossing the street)? *Instead, they raised the price of bread, yet again. How can you raise a family, get on in life, develop and 'find a way out' in situation like that?* This same theme of not having a basis to stand on, a platform to build upon, expressed by these van drivers, also came up in an interview I had with a well-known and politically engaged theatre actress, Hanane Hajj Ali. I spoke with her after she had organized a manifestation against the demolition of one of Beirut's rare public parks (I will come back to this demonstration in Chapter 6). She had asked me join her on her morning walk through the park. She started off our conversation by pointing to the trajectory of the sun – where the sun would pass at which hour. Then she pointed to the high-rise apartment buildings that were built only a few years previously and were now keeping out the sunlight in the early morning. Where before you could see the sun rise at 6AM, now you would have to wait until 7.30 – the time of our conversation. *With all these new constructions we can't see the sun, we can't breathe*, she lamented. *All the while it would be so easy to stop these constructions – all it would take is five simple laws. But politicians are not willing to stop project they themselves profit from, of course. This is the corruption [here], that no law will get voted in.* She continued: *We can't engage the state on the basis of rights, they have no political programs [for which we can vote, which we can decide on]. All they do is sit there and make sure their interests are secure.* Later she wished they could have a civic state with rights and duties. *Instead, everyone is bought – politicians, voters, media.* ([Informal] interview February 2009)

Venerable Marxist intellectual Fawwaz Traboulsi also came to talk about this same topic of rights and duties, during a round table in March 2012 about ‘why the revolution did not happen’ in Lebanon, despite the fact some of the energy of the Arab Spring had caught on. The main argument of his contribution was that ‘we’ (the mostly young activists in the room) needed to be clear on what to focus on: try and topple a ‘system’ (the sectarian system) or to work on laws. His preference was the latter – work out a constitution that could correct the ‘illegal’ outgrowths of the political system as it is now. In reply to his talk, a young woman, seemingly completely missing or ignoring Traboulsi’s propos, argued that *as long as there is no state, there is nothing we can make appropriate strategic decisions for*. Traboulsi retorted that in fact there is a state and that we are in this struggle to change it. However, in saying this, he ran counter a stock phrase in the ‘standard discourse’ about the state in Lebanon – and apparently deeply held conviction by at least some – that ‘there is no state’ (just as ‘there is no order’). If true, then indeed Traboulsi’s proposal would make no sense. Believing it to be true was perhaps the reason why the young woman seemed not to be able to pick up on what he said.

A number of interlinked themes emerge from this wide variety of moments and situations. One is the theme of the absent state *tout court* (in: the young woman at the round table; the director of the NGO); another is the state that doesn’t respect or recognize formal citizenship (in: one of the Van 4 drivers; Hanane); and a final one we can surmise is the theme of state ‘captured’ by private interests, whether that be for one’s own gain – that of the political clique (in: Jammal’s resigned comments), or for ‘the (sectarian) other’ – (in: the glassmaker’s fiery complaint). Together, these themes make clear that ‘the neglectful or failed state’ is a social reality that is reproduced on a daily basis<sup>87</sup>.

People in Khandaq share in these discursive formulae, at times in their most generic forms (like the ones we’ve just seen), at times in their more socially positioned variation, namely that the state is there for some, but not for them, the residents of Khandaq. Relative deprivation emerges as a noticeable pattern in the way Khandaq residents talk about themselves. However, before describing this perspective more fully, let me tie it back into the way people talk about the mukhtar. Precisely the complaint about the mukhtar is that in fact – despite his informal job description as ‘elder’ – he does *not* serve the community, i.e. the interests of residents. The complaints about mukhtars we’ve seen run in close parallel to the theme of the lack of ‘state’ respect for citizens and their rights, as well as

to the idea that politicians (and/or top-level bureaucrats) work for their own interests. Arguably (loosely per Gupta 1995), the lived experiences with mukhtars provide opportunities for people to develop their own perspectives on such more widely circulating notions and ideas.

What such perspectives seem to develop in Khandaq is the theme of neglect that is emphasized, within this bigger family of themes of failed statehood. That sense of neglect is not something that is elaborated merely through the imagination of local state representatives as aloof from neighbourhood preoccupations. I also heard the argument of state neglect expressed several times in connection to neighbourhood dilapidation and lack of social order. In fact, as one woman asserted as we were sitting on her balcony, with the Downtown skyline on the horizon, the fact it had some modicum of infrastructural endowment was merely because the area was close to Downtown. The further you get from Downtown, especially into the Shia areas (the suburbs, the South of Lebanon) the fewer the amenities (measured in this case in hours of electricity per day). Because, as a Shia friend from the suburbs also explained, *the government always neglects Shia areas*. The Khatib building, mentioned in Chapter 2, is often cited as a sore in people's eyes, particularly by those beholders that like to see themselves as upstanding citizens, with a certain standard and class (and who might be afraid to be dragged down by the reputation of the building and the neighbourhood). These same people often also complain about 'refugees', squatters and criminalized youths that deserve state intervention – to "clean up" the area and its streets – but do not get it. While these latter specific points are certainly not shared by everyone, the sense of neglect is definitely shared almost universally. The theme is really a structuring feature of the way folks talk about themselves – and thus of others and their place in the national universe. A 'discourse' in that limited sense<sup>88</sup>. I'll call it the discourse of neglect. Further below, I will explicate the links between this sense of neglect and the identification with 'the ordinary man'. For the moment, I want to close this section about the mukhtar and the state with two remarks. Firstly, the discourse of neglect implies that people have certain expectations of what a state should be and do. I've not had these expectations clearly explicated to me in Khandaq; instead they were formulated only in their negation. The key undergirding idea though is that it exists to protect the interests of 'the people'. Secondly, people obviously do not have only one frame to talk about the state and their relation to it. So it is for people in Khandaq as well. There is one alternative discourse I want to highlight now.

88 I pretend no technical deployment of the term, otherwise.



**Strongmen and the defiant community** There is an agentive spin that can be given to the ‘neglect’, when the absence of the state becomes a fact of accomplishment: it’s not the state that doesn’t come in, but it’s we who keep the state out! Let’s call this a discourse of defiance. The discourse of defiance is somewhat at odds with the discourse of neglect, because it doesn’t entirely erase moral claims on the state, it merely constitutes a basic assertion that ‘the neighbourhood’ or ‘the community’ can ward off any interference in its affairs by ‘the state’. Sometimes there is also a more positive formulation of such autarky, in the sense that the community can take care of itself. However, I’ve not heard this affirmation come up very often, which is why I suggest this discourse is not simply the flipside of the discourse of neglect, as in: ‘we don’t *need* the state to take care of us, we’ll just do it ourselves’. (Implicit) moral appeals on the state area made along rejections of its authority, even if they are ‘logically’ at odds with each other.

The ‘discourse of defiance’ is one that is also elaborated on the basis of (daily and not so daily) experiences of neighbourhood living and particularly experiences with local governance relations and practices. I will discuss a few examples – some incidental, some structural, some grand, some ordinary – of different ways social control is exercised – outside of the direct purview and sometimes in contravention to the (symbolic) authority of Lebanese state institutions. I start off with the examples of neighbourhood strongmen and elders and their regulatory work, move on to a symbolically defining moment of neighbourhood autarky during the 2008 ‘small civil war’, and close off with some institutional sketches of charity and political organization.

Let us first go back to our civil war veteran and now Hizbullah affiliate, Abu Zalem. As I explained in the previous chapter, people come to him for a range of issues. Let me pick a few examples of things he has played some role in. Like with the mukhtars, people come to him with marital disputes (giving him some moral and symbolic communal authority). One afternoon, after having just reconciled – with a few sweet words – two men, one of whom known to be a bit of a drunkard, who had gotten into an emotional fight, he received a phone call. Looking at the call screen, before picking up, he said, *ah, here comes a problem*. Problem number 5, that day. He looked weary. On his way to his car, a few moments later, he expressed his frustration at this man he now had to go to, a *niswanji*, a philanderer, who was wont to spend (too much of) his money on paid sex. His wife had now called him out on it. After having returned, Abu Zalem recounted that by the time he arrived on the scene, quite a few people had already gotten involved. The wife’s demand was that he stay



at home rather than chasing women. Abu Zalem demanded he agree. He agreed. *That was that*, a tired-looking Abu Zalem concluded.

He also helps out people materially, whether directly or by hooking up the person to a charity organization. He may land someone a job, such as Hussein, a satellite member of his clique, who squats a decrepit turn-of-the-19<sup>th</sup>-century house (well, he insists he pays the rent to the owner who lives in Syria and comes to collect it sometimes, but not always) just a stone's throw away from 'Abu Zalem's street'. When a real-estate developer in the neighbourhood thought he needed a security guard from looting youngsters, he contacted Abu Zalem, as the person with the authority to deploy someone and back him up (symbolically). Abu Zalem, knowing that Hussein lived off odd jobs, suggested Hussein who then took on a kind of supervisory and concierge type role on the construction site.

He has also helped people in finding and or securing a residence. When he was still a commander for the Baath party, directly after the first two years of the civil war, he organized entry into the buildings abandoned by the Christian population of the area, providing refuge for a significant number of displaced Shia from East Beirut and the South. A different contemporary case I was partially a witness to was a small crisis when the family of a Khandaq resident that lived in a confessionally mixed area on the far side of East Beirut, were threatened to be kicked out by a landlord who also happened to be employed in the military police. (Abu Zalem's reading was that he therefore thought he could operate above the law). Abu Zalem referred the resident to an officer he knew who outranked the landlord and was able to mediate the conflict.

This type of contact with the security establishment (police, internal security, army) is perhaps the one characteristic that distinguishes Abu Zalem most in the eyes of Khandaq residents and his network within that establishment is perhaps what most undergirds his claim to authority. He says he built up this network during the civil war and that those relations allow him to enter into negotiation with members of that establishment. One example is the one just given; here I give one more example because it pertains directly to the themes that I highlight in this chapter through which people identify and position themselves. As previously mentioned, Khandaq youth have some reputation of getting into trouble – while this is a stereotype deployed mostly by outsiders, a kerfuffle does happen. Abu Zalem to the rescue.

AZ: I ask for a favour, they [the army, the police] ask for a favor. It's an exchange of services. That's how it is (*ṭabī'īya*, "natural") – *normal* [in German].

M: So what can you do of service for them?

AZ: So they would have people, criminals, they can't take them from here. I help them. If there's a problem, like incidents with burning tires, or [other] trouble [*mashākil*], we handle it so that that the situation doesn't get out of hand.

M: Can you give an example?

AZ: So for example, we had some guys (*shabāb*) here – they were getting into trouble with the Lebanese army. It would have been close...

M: You mean like fistfights?

AZ: And bullets. I have to go and resolve the situation. I grab (*ishab*) the guys that belong to me and bring them back here, so I solve the problem. The guys that are with us in the party (*'anna bil hizb*).

M: And then you go to the army...

AZ: and we end the issue.

M: So how can you do that if the guys are clearly in the wrong?

AZ: OK, but how did the problem occur? Between us and [Hariri's] Future [Movement]. Some of the guys would go up [towards the adjoining neighbourhood], others would come and they'd get into fights with each other. The army intervenes to take them apart. The *shabāb* then get into trouble with the army. Well, trouble, you know, [they'd exchange] words – so I take them back, the army wraps up things, it's over, and they tell me, ok, we no longer want anything.

M: Because they know the easiest way to calm things down is through agreement?

AZ: Yes, precisely! Through agreement.

Abu Zalem is doing some mediating and regulating in this very interview – downplaying the severity of conflicts with the security establishment, oscillating between “words”, “firsts” and “bullets” for his depiction of the altercations (and yours truly is happy to assist in supplying ‘agreement’ as the key pacifying concept through which to understand relations with police and military).

Below I'll highlight and explore Abu Zalem's claim that security forces wouldn't be able to come into the neighbourhood. Here, however, I want to elaborate on the performative power of words we see at work in the interview with Abu Zalem, which actually appear to be a staple instrument in the social elder's toolkit in his<sup>89</sup> maintenance of social order. Mukhtar Baydoun already spoke of ‘sweet-talking’ as a strategy (“you're

89 Undoubtedly hers as well: surely there are big women in the neighbourhood. That, however, was a world closed to me.

a good guy, let's take it easy"). One of the Kurdish big men, from just around the bloc, mentioned doing the same. I was introduced to this figure, Abu Ali, through one of the Abu Zalem's men, who happened to have a close relation to him and was therefore deemed an appropriate link, after I had inquired about whom I should to speak to from the Kurdish contingent in Khandaq. Abu Ali was presented as an equivalent to Abu Zalem for the Kurds (in function, not in significance, of course). He turned out to be a very outgoing and jovial man, heading towards 50, who had a knack for making one feel welcomed. We had a few conversations over a period of two weeks in his small home appliances store. I initiated our talk by asking him if he could tell me something about the history of the Kurds in the neighbourhood, aiming my first questions at the evolution of the housing situation. He quickly came to talk of the omnipresent theme of Sunni-Shia tensions though. That is to say, to clarify that these tension do not really exist. It is merely a problem of trouble-makers, he explained, of youngsters who hang around on the street and take drugs. *In their mind, there's a problem between Sunna and Shia. It is such youngsters to whom he addresses 'sweet words' (kilimtayn hîlwîn).* Whenever a fight arises, such words can quiet the situation: *'come on now, we're all neighbours, this is no way to solve a problem, come on, give each other a kiss'.* When you have a reputation of treating people right and fair, like Abu Ali does, the boys will listen<sup>90</sup>.

However, sweet words are but one way of maintaining peace and order. Another is imposing the right frame (the right definition of the situation, if you will). With the injunction 'we are all neighbours', Abu Ali touched on a topic of conversation that proved a recurrent theme in our conversations: that of neighbourliness (*jîreh*). As our conversations progressed, the concept took on greater meaning and relevance. Originally, he introduced it as a way to describe (inter-communitarian) relations in the building where he lived. Neighbourliness in that context consisted of the little things and services you do for each other, as neighbours. *You ask whether they need something, whether all is well, you knock on each other's door.* However, not long after, one of Abu Ali's close acquaintances passed by and added a dimension, that of living together with people from and

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90 Being known, or "having relations" to the persons involved is the key to such authority, as agree mukhtar Baydoun as well as Abu Zalem. The converse is ruinous. Baydoun's assistant, a retired officer from internal security, deplored the militias during the civil war. Not only did they cause "chaos", not being disciplined like the army, but they also meddled in local affairs. *It might also happen, say, that you would be fighting with your wife, and that a Palestinian kid would come up to you and tell you to knock it off. On what basis is he doing that? What is his relation [to you]??*

on their street. That's "jireh" as well. There's no fundamental difference between the two dimensions of *jireh*, but in the latter case it entails you sit, and drink tea with each other, and that you keep an eye out for each other. The visitor gave an example: *recently the son of [a young Shia man, who had only just sat with us for a while], had fallen ill, but the man had been stuck at work. Therefore, his wife had gone down with the boy to grab a taxi to the hospital. Someone asked her what was wrong and then took her to the hospital himself and stayed with her all night. That's jireh, too.*

Slowly, through these examples, the notion evolved to represent a kind of non-sectarian disposition. Being neighbourly means being embarrassed to ask questions pertaining to one's confessional identity or to talk of Shia-Sunni-Kurdish tensions. Being neighbourly means instead *to live together, all of us in this neighbourhood* (mant'a). Abu Ali continued:

Much like in the Netherlands, in fact, where, when you sit together in a café ["coffeeshop"], nobody asks whether you're Roman Catholic or Orthodox. No, you're Dutch! We're from the same country. This is also how we have to start anew, without such differences. Neighbourliness means: to stand with each other [*nū'af ma` ba`d*]. To support and defend each other.

Abu Ali and his interlocutors (including myself) construed a more explicit rendition of a theme that is more commonly (not only in Khandaq but across the Arab world) and more implicitly framed in kinship terms. Several were the occasions that people declared Khandaq to be one "family", where "everybody loves each other". The point here is that such declarations do not reveal a hitherto undiscovered and unique tribe of people who for once and for all gave peace a chance, but that they are performative in their intention. When Abu Ali calls on his young troublemakers to be good neighbours, one may question its effectiveness in ending an actual fight, yet I would submit there is a double constitutive effect of the incantation: it does call people to belong and abide by the bonds of neighbourliness, as an encompassing ideal to cultivate in general. Perhaps more significant yet, it also recasts the occurrence of "trouble" [*mashkal*] as something that is *not* conflict. That is, it constitutes not merely an appeal to cleave to communal peace but attempts to prevent a reading of actually occurring conflict as a breach of such communal peace, thus symbolically maintaining social order<sup>91</sup>.

From the power of words I return to the symbolism of practices. In the

quote from Abu Zalem above you were able to read his claim that security forces “can’t take [someone wanted by the law] from here”. This idea was substantiated by one of the men of his inner circle when he explained the story of a relative newcomer to the tea talks Abu Zalem hold every day. The young man, Anwar, wasn’t a new face as such, in fact he was part of a rather notorious corner group. He was friendly enough, but always quite restless – nervous and jumpy – when he visited the tea group. He stood out, I felt, in part because the men drawn to, and educated and trained by, Abu Zalem tended to be serious (if not in demeanour at least in substance), talked politics and attempted to stick to the straight and narrow. So I asked one of the regular clique about what Anwar’s deal was – why did he seem so nervous? After laughing heartily about the question and sharing it with the others as a joke, he went on to explain that Anwar was wanted by the law, for stealing or using drugs (perhaps both). Abu Zalem had talked to the police and worked out a deal that as long as Anwar stayed within the confines of the neighbourhood, he would not be apprehended. By the fact that he was now also visiting the tea group, I surmised that a part of the deal (whether with the police or between Abu Zalem and Anwar privately) was that Abu Zalem would also try and influence him in a positive way – and perhaps recruit him to Hizbullah’s cause (as he had done with others).

We thus see a claim here to the autarky of social regulation in the neighbourhood, in the form of such everyday negotiations with the security establishment. There is also an exceptional but perhaps far more paradigmatic moment in which such autarky was also (violently) claimed for the area, namely during the events of May 2008, which people in Beirut often called “the small civil war”. It struck me as a highly significant and salient episode in a seemingly widely shared narrative about the neighbourhood’s history and position in Beirut. Though many called it a small civil war, that is mostly because it reminded people of the big one and of the suddenly not so abstract possibility of its ‘recurrence’, not so much because it actually resembled one. It consisted of a sequence of a few days’ fighting: one of intense fighting, others of consolidation of a quickly attained status quo. The principal protagonists in the fighting were Hizbullah troops and a loosely organized ‘militia’ tied to Hariri’s Future Movement. Each side had several allies that were to differing extents practically involved in the conflict. Most of the fighting took place in municipal Beirut, with Hizbullah fighters (perceived as) ‘coming into’ the city (from the southern suburbs), though (sectarian) ‘contact zones’ in the southern suburbs (especially around the airport) also saw serious fighting (cf. Bou Akar 2012). The direct spark in the powder keg was

a decision by the government, led at the time by the Hariri faction<sup>92</sup>, to shut down a Hizbullah telecommunications receiver located in the Beirut International Airport. It was framed as a threat to national sovereignty, in theoretical terms (a non-sanctioned telecom network within national boundaries) and practical ones (such a network enables Hizbullah to engage in behaviour that risks drawing the ire of third nations). The powder keg itself had been stuffed over almost two years though, over two interlinked issues. One was the heightened controversy over Hizbullah's military power following the July 2006 war, when Israel retaliated against Lebanon after Hizbullah kidnapped a few Israeli soldiers. The second was a year and a half long political stalemate over whom to vote in as the new President of the Republic.

Hizbullah obviously did not take what they saw as an attempt to decapitate the 'Resistance' lying down and immediately secured and took over the airport and quite effectively fought off any resistance they found, mostly in the mixed neighbourhoods in Beirut (where Sunni and Shia live together) and along the main infrastructural axes leading to the airport. The army, wary of any internal communitarian rifts and political divisions that could lead to internal schisms, stayed largely aloof from the fighting, restricting its activities to securing areas peripheral to the (most intense) fighting. As mentioned, within a few days it was clear that the victory was Hizbullah's and that most of their opponents had been disarmed. However the crisis did lend a greater sense of urgency to the political stalemate and precipitated closer foreign involvement. Soon after, an accord was struck in Doha that served as the formal basis for renewed political engagements in the years to follow.

While Khandaq was not an 'area peripheral to the fighting', it certainly also was not at the very heart of the conflict. Some fighting took place there, though principally at its outer edges – along those infrastructural axes. Abu Zalem's men were also called to arms. According to their accounts, they immediately sealed off the 'external borders' of the area, that is, the junctions with the main roads encircling Khandaq on the north (Fouad Shehab) and east (Bechara al-Khoury). As to internal borders, the crossing into the Basta Tahta neighbourhood, immediately to the south and next to the mostly Sunni mosque, popularly regarded as a 'contact' area, wasn't sealed off, since that area was all "us" (i.e., Hizbullah), militarily at least. They all presented these operations as emanating from Abu Zalem's office – just like in the old days of the big war, when that

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92 By now, the faction was headed by Saad Hariri (or at least, had him as its public face), after his father's assassination in 2005.

same office had been the local HQ, protected by sandbags – where, as one of the men somewhat fondly and proudly recalled, guns were stacked hip-high. However, they weren't put to all that much use, because Abu Zalem's experience dictated that the first days of war are always chaotic and hence dangerous. First you need to see how things settle and get your bearings in the new situation. So they waited. But since the 'war' never lasted beyond these first few days, there was relatively little action (they kept the roads closed for about 10 days). The only death Khandaq had to mourn was of a young man who had climbed onto a roof ("on pills" but without having been instructed to do so, as one of Abu Zalem's men clarified) – and was taken down by a sniper from the Future Movement.

At the time of my research at least (with memories still vivid), the symbolic significance of these events could scantily be underestimated. Its significance was that 'the neighbourhood' (at least from the perspective of the Shia residents) came to its own rescue and managed to keep out threats to its integrity. These threats were in part from a political and sectarian other, but in perhaps larger and more practical part, from the army, which was effectively kept out. Perhaps indicative of the importance of the moment and its mark on self-perception is the observation that a young woman made about that time. I had gotten to know her father when I was still on the search for a place to live, and continued to drop by occasionally for tea in the afternoon. We were sitting on the balcony, overlooking the old (and heavily dilapidated) core of Khandaq, with boys roaming the streets looking for some action, passing underneath. The view prompted the following comment. She said those few days in May had turned her opinion about the corner boys 180 degrees: from her earlier annoyance with their antics and poor manners she went to pride about how they risked their lives for the safety of the neighbourhood. She never saw them with the same eyes afterward.<sup>93</sup> The events thus appear to have consolidated both a sense of a moral community (one that is ambiguously or vaguely sectarian and/or neighbourhood-based) – a community for which one is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice<sup>94</sup> – as well as the notion of neighbourhood autarky or sovereignty – manifested in the ability to maintain the integrity of its boundaries.

I come back to his notion of the moral community towards the end of the chapter. For the moment, however, I need to dwell on one aspect

93 Abu Zalem's men spoke with similar pride of their own feats, but also imputed this same pride to these corner boys themselves, for their participation in this 'war' (and, incidentally, that they now thought they were ready for any new war that may be lurking around the corner; this was rather worrying, because as one of the men pointed out, that was no war).

94 Compare Rooden's conceptualization of the moral community that emphasizes this aspect (Rooden 1996: 78).

of residents' self-narration that is closely related to the idea of autarky but puts a slightly different accent: self-sufficiency. There are two practical sides to this self-sufficiency: one is the informal and ad-hoc initiatives residents themselves organize, the second are the formalized and regular but non-governmental programs, mostly in the charity business. Abu Zalem's interventions in the neighbourhood might again provide some examples of the first category. He wields tangible authority over the street his 'office' is on. The most direct proof of that authority is that he is able to plaster parts of the street in yellow Hizbullah flags and posters of Hizbullah greats (the "martyred" military leader Imad Mughnieh and General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah, primarily) – in a context where party signs are jealously guarded as markers of political territory<sup>95</sup> it must mean Abu Zalem is able to impose his will on competitors. (Beyond any individual authority he might exercise, there is also the power of numbers – several plots on and just off that street belong to members of his extended family.) Other interventions in the physical environment point more to the aspect of self-sufficiency: with the support of a donor, Abu Zalem had a clean water tank installed, a small one first, on the corner of the street, a more substantial one later, just opposite his office. In a setting with much irregular housing and poor provisions in the older building stock, access to (relatively) clean water is not self-evident. (The majority of users turn out to be Syrian and Sudanese migrant workers, who generally live in the poorest conditions.) Next to the big water tank, Abu Zalem and his clique slowly built a patio and garden, on the side of the road, technically on land that belongs to the municipality (see chapter 2; see pictures on next page). For a while, this was their favourite place to consume their daily cups of tea and discuss the latest news; some of the youth have also used it as a place to hang out. Finally, people take their own provisions for maintaining 'public' infrastructure. Abu Zalem & Co. – reportedly in consultation with the municipality – built speed-bumps on 'their' road and hauled cement over to improve an improvised parking lot and walkway to a squatted house. A similar situation existed over at Ragheb's street, where, for example, a member of Ragheb's extended family paid the worker from the public-private Sukleen garbage collection company a bit on the side to pass an extra broom on that street as well.

95 My hunch is that in popular Beirut neighbourhoods like Khandaq they are perceived and guarded as such mostly by – the youthful elements of – local chapters, rather than as official, top-down policy instruments. However, posters and flags along the major thoroughfares (and perhaps other main roads) in the southern suburbs do appear to part of a concerted policy. See for example Harb 2010: 144f.).





The self-made patio (on land expropriated for infra-structural works) for daily tea talks, including water tanks for general use.

Besides these more ad-hoc attempts to improve or maintain living conditions, there are a number of charity organizations active that support families in a number of domains. Most of these organizations or programs are directly tied to a political party; some are tied to religious institutions and/or leaders. Some of these are 'need-based' and other more 'merit-based', if you will. That is, while some organizations don't pay too much attention to political affiliation, others keep closer track of such matters.

Residents subsequently know on which door they need not knock. In so far as I know, none of the charitable organizations doles out cash assistance. Instead they deliver comestibles to the neediest of families, (partially) cover medical fees or tuition (in establishments of their own choice, usually) or provide medical supplies, such as crutches or hospital beds for care at home. The political parties pay special attention to the families of martyrs<sup>96</sup>; non-affiliated organizations generally look at need only – though (moral) reputation does play a role. The money for the assistance comes from wealthy donors, parties (that receive contributions from a number of sources), as well as the small contributions that residents contribute through collection boxes at various kinds of local stores and mosques. Selection of recipients usually occurs in consultation with locals – elders or people who are well-positioned to know (for example, one mini-market owner, given that he sees the whole street cross his doorstep, had also been asked to form a list of possible recipients) – though organization employees tend to make contact with recipients first as well.

The question now is what such practices mean to residents. Part of their significance derives from how they inform the discourse of defiance so pervasive in the area. I have given two kinds of practices in this paragraph: one of defence and closure and another of self-sufficiency. There are two semiotic levels on which these practices are linked to the discourse. On a fundamental level, both play in slightly different ways into the opposition of an inside and outside to the neighbourhood that undergirds the discourse of defiance – the opposition more precisely of a community on the inside and a state on the outside. While the first kind allows people to emphasize antagonism, the second kind speaks to a more affirmative sense of autonomy. Then, on a second, thematic, level, each practice can be related to the power to influence state policy and practice and the idea of territorial autonomy of the neighbourhood, respectively. Both elements are captured in the quintessential and oft repeated watchword of this discourse: “the state doesn’t enter here!” Most likely, that ‘slogan’ derives originally from the events of May 2008, and the effective closure of the neighbourhood from outside forces. The storyline can subsequently be corroborated with stories such as Anwar’s. In conjunction then with more widely circulating discursive frames (not in the least the territorial frame discussed in Chapter 1), people use these events, practices and relations to elaborate what their place is in the territorial space of that state, and by extension how they belong to community and nation.

<sup>96</sup> Which, incidentally, makes it difficult to gather information about their practices, because it makes all information politically sensitive.

As a short interlude, I might point out here that there is a disconnect between what people say happens and what actually happens. The 'state' does in fact 'enter'. To take one of two more prominent examples, one early morning in May 2010 the police raided a 7-storey building that Ammar was sub-letting at a handsome profit to hundreds of Syrian and Sudanese (construction) workers, as well as Ethiopian and some South-Asian domestic workers. The police drove out and presumably deported the African and South-Asian residents. Ammar was called in for questioning and later mumbled something to me about 'not knowing it was illegal' and that he'd 'only be renting out to Syrians' from now on. Another rather conspicuous entry occurred in the heat of the 2010 football world championship. World cups are a major event in Lebanon and many people support their favourite country fervently. (Also, theories abound about sect-specific allegiances, mostly based on diasporic trajectories.) This particular evening, Brazil had just lost to the Netherlands. Brazil was one of the more popular football countries in Khandaq. When two young men then dared to parade through the streets on their motorbike brandishing the Dutch flag, the man who sat on the backseat was pulled off the vehicle and a fight ensued. According to second-hand sources, someone – an 'informer' – then called in the army, probably because tension were high in the country and people feared escalations of violence. By the time the army came in in jeeps the fight had already cleared though. Still, they set up a perimeter on the two streets they entered from, ordering the streets to be cleared and for everyone to enter their houses (they were partially obeyed). An intelligence agent and an acquaintance of Abu Zalem's conferred with the latter, and they seemed to jointly decide on subsequent action (the soldiers stayed for about an hour or so).

Such discrepancies with the discourse of defiance should underscore that my argument is obviously not that there would be some determinative directionality from *experiences* with the (local) state and informal regulation to *perceptions* of state and community. Such perceptions arise at the confluence of these experiences and more widely circulating discourses; or to rephrase the earlier argument inspired by Gupta: there is a dialectical semiotic process in which people accomplish two inextricably linked goals: people appropriate elements from dominant discourses in order to make sense of the experiences, and they make sense of the social entities (such as, 'the state') proposed in dominant discourses based on their experiences. Having described some of the experiences as well as having provide some glimpses of how people make sense of them, I still need to complete my analytical task by situating the discourse of defiance partic-

ularly (and of neglect, peripherally) in a (history of a) political discursive field in Lebanon.<sup>97</sup>

**Ashura and the people's scepticism** The implication or rather the premise of the pride of being able to stave off outside threats and to keep out the state is that the latter poses a threat (to community autarky and identity). While such mistrust of state authorities is hardly unique in global comparison, it nevertheless begs the question how it has come to exist in Lebanon. For Shia in particular, it seems the idea has taken shape in part through a trope intimately tied to the history of the mobilization of the Shia community, in which the Shia were depicted as the community of the "deprived". That key notion can be dated back to just before the civil war, with the nascence of the political precursor to Amal: Musa al-Sadr's "Movement of the Deprived" ("*maḥrūmīn*", also translated as 'disinherited'). Musa al-Sadr was a cleric from Iran – though with a lineage that traced back to Lebanon – who was sent to act as the leader for the southern city of Tyre (in 1960) and quite quickly developed into a vocal representative of the Shia community in Lebanon. He appears to have been a clever political tactician in promoting his goal of protecting and developing the (largely Shia) South. From the start, he asserted and promoted his independence (and that of other clerics) from major (Southern) Shia political bosses, maintaining a safe distance while still building some bridges to others. He soon found support with President Chehab, appointed after the 1958 uprising (briefly mentioned in Chapter 2), who thought Lebanon's peace lay in a more balanced development of the different regions and a reduction of the clout wielded by the (rural) political bosses. Thus, with Chehab's support, Sadr was able to found (in 1967) the still existing Supreme Islamic Shia Council (SICS), which not only served

97 Rather than situating it "locally", one can also veer in the opposite analytical direction. The alternation between the two discourses here resonates with discourses about the state worldwide, in particular these seemingly ubiquitous ambivalences about the state. Kelly & Shah (2006) introduced their special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* on (state) violence by taking up Tilly's idea of the double-edged nature of state protection – often states have protected subjects from the consequences of its own activities. The combination of fear and protection that ensues is the basis for an ambivalence towards the state that Copeland (2014) and Nelson (2009) also take up. Nelson explains that Mayans have been betrayed by both state and guerrilla and therefore engage in pragmatic resistance and engagement, alternately, with either. Copeland builds on this and argues that as people see that organized resistance is (made) impossible (by the state), they engage in the dishonest clientelist "grubbing" with (state and party) officials, producing an equally profound ambivalence. There may be something about the modern state itself, then, set up to fail its own expectations, which engenders such ambivalences. In any case, as I explain immediately below and at the end of the chapter, it's not a zero-sum game for Khandaq residents. Their identification of the good and the bad in the state and the party is situational, contextual.

as an officially recognized site of Shia jurisprudence, but also as an important relay point for economic resources. (cf. Gharbieh 2010: 111) He also advocated greater intervention by the Lebanese state to protect the South from Israeli attacks, which had steadily started to increase as the thrust of the Palestinian resistance shifted towards Lebanon. In all his activities he was careful to frame his advocacy in national terms and not exclusively communitarian ones: the SISC served the purpose of greater engagement with and integration into the national state; the army was called to defend the South, not the Shia. (cf. Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 27, 35f.)

Increasingly though, he was unable to maintain this frame. The 'Movement of the Deprived' may serve to illustrate this development. The foundation of that 'Movement' (which was more a political frame under which Sadr allied a number of political players), in 1973, was most directly precipitated (according to Gharbieh 2010: 137f.) by increased resistance to Chehab's projects by the Southern Kamil al-As'ad and other allied rural 'za'ims'. In order to enhance his influence over Southern politics, Sadr therefore needed to shift into a more militant gear. In the foundational speech Sadr held in Baalbeck he called on the state to take greater care of its deprived citizens – while he thus still framed it as a non-sectarian issue and got leaders from various denominations to sign the accompanying declaration, there were a number of reasons why the 'deprived' would increasingly be associated with 'Shia' in the following years. Already the rally at Baalbeck was attended mostly by Shia, influencing the reception of the message. However, not long after he established a militia – Amal – to fend off Israeli incursion when the Lebanese state proved incapable of doing so, thus siding himself on the Palestinian side of an increasingly controversial and divisive issue (and, I will recall, one of the main sparks of the 15 year war period to follow). Moreover, after 1975, his cross-sectarian relations lost strength and Amal was increasingly redeployed in Lebanese battles. Steadily, the Movement of the Deprived lost funding and impetus and ultimately made way for Amal as its successor after Sadr's 'disappearance' in Libya in 1978. Amal claimed the heritage of the Movement of the Deprived but now – in a context of 'civil' (sectarian) war – much more unambiguously as a *Shia* movement.

How is this political heritage made relevant in the current context? Obviously the idea of a more militant defence of material interest of those neglected by the state, encapsulated in Sadr's category of the 'deprived', seems relevant in the context described above. However, that was then and this is now. How has that particular idea fared over the years? It seems to me its relevance needs to be located in the current competition between Amal and Hizbullah for the hearts and minds of Lebanese Shia.

Amal has ceded its ideological hegemony to Hizbullah, but as I will show remains relevant in the Khandaq context.

The master category for Hizbullah's political discourse is the Resistance Society. The term obviously derives from its fight against Israel, but it actually has come to serve as a node to which many values are connected. Let me single out three. Firstly, as Deeb (2006a) argues, the Resistance is tied to what is perhaps the quintessential Shia ritual, Ashura (see more below). The commemoration of Imam Husayn's brutal martyrdom at the hand of the 'Sunni' Caliph Yazid is explicitly compared with Hizbulah's (Lebanon's and Palestine's) resistance to the occupier and oppressor Israel. Closely tied to this first aspect, a second aspect of the Resistance Society is the value of a broader claim for self-determination – not merely from Israeli occupying forces, but equally from nefarious influences from U.S.-Western powers, whether or not by Lebanese proxies.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the 'Resistance' is also used as the container term for a particular kind of piety – a 'pious modern' (Deeb 2006a) – in which Shia enter the modern era, with economic development in all its facets, but in which they do not have to lose their soul as they imagine Western modernity has done (probably after reading the conclusion to the *Protestant Ethic*), but rather modernise their own spirituality, in moving away from mere "tradition" to an "understanding" practice of rite and duty. The running theme here is thus one of (personal, communal) autonomy.

Both Amal's discourse and Hizbullah's therefore offer discursive 'openings' to formulate a sceptical distance from the state (whether it be plaintive or agentive). Yet, whereas Hizbullah's is mostly a proud affirmation of one's own strength and worth, Amal's offer is premised on an identification with the 'small man' (again, it can be in a plaintive or in a more combative mode). Yet, these discursive heritages are not simply a question of the people vs. the state. The discourse provides openings for people's sceptical distance *and* elective rapprochement from and to the state, as much as it does from and to each party. To give one small indication of the first: Hizbullah's ('sectarian' or 'Shia') pride is also its bid for Lebanese nationalism: 'Our Resistance society is the strength and purity we have to offer the nation' (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 37, 66, *passim*); Amal's focus on the little man is linked to a commitment to the state as the locus of collective action, which its ideologues (including Sadr) have tied to a commitment to (political) secularism. In the Lebanese political space, that is form

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98 It is important to note here that these values are affirmed as not merely Shia values, but also national(ist) ones. On this – perhaps typically Lebanese version of the – tension between communal and national belonging, see the following paragraph.



of nationalism, in that it advocates transcending particular interests. To get a sense of how these polyvalent discursive traditions allow people to frame their stance towards state, nation party, I need to situate each in one last ethnographic vignette.

I turn therefore to a final example of both social regulation and ritual demarcation of the neighbourhood. This time the event involves not merely local elders who operate officially or informally as representatives of state or party, but more directly formal party apparatuses themselves. The example is the aforementioned, 'quintessentially Shia' festival: Ashura. With the Ashura festival Shia commemorate the defeat and death of the last serious claimant to the throne of the Caliphate on behalf of those who believed that that throne should be occupied only by those related to Mohammad by blood. It is a festival that lasts for 10 days where ritually enacted grief is central. Most prominently, two kinds of occasions organize for such grief: the gatherings in the so-called *husayniyas*<sup>99</sup>, where a preacher tells the story of Hussein, his family and friends, and the sacrifice they made, to different degrees of heart-rending detail. Crying is an expected part of such gatherings, though clerical opinion differs on how open such crying may be. A second occasion of grief is the procession for men in honour of Hussein's memory, where the participants engage in ritual self-flagellation. The degree to which this may be harmful to the body is also a point of contestation.

Perhaps due to the centrality of the festival in defining Shia Islam (as opposed to Sunni strands of Islam), it has been subject to various kinds of politicization and controversy – over the centuries as much as over the last decades. One change in the meaning of Ashura has been advocated by Musa Sadr as well as clerics and officials from the Iranian Republic, which is to turn some of that grief into revolutionary fervour, to rise up against contemporary forms of oppression, just as the martyred Imam Hussein rose up against the evil caliph Yazid. But here I would like to draw attention to the just mentioned controversies over the degree and public display of emotion and affect during the festival's central events: the gatherings and the procession. I'll focus on the latter and in particular on the form of self-flagellation that takes place there.

In Lebanon, especially in the southern town of Nabatiya, considered a centre of Lebanese Shia culture, the form self-flagellation takes what is called *ḍarb al-ḥaydar*: men recurrently tap or beat a cut (on their head) so the wound does not heal and the blood keeps flowing. As Shaery-

99 A locale for religious congregation, separate from the mosque, especially used for Ashura.

Eisenlohr (2008: 130-136) explains, the practice of *haydar* appears to have been introduced from Iran by local merchants (around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and then was continued and elaborated locally, despite continuous criticism from an assortment of religious leaders. But the procession grew so big that it tied into to (regional) economic interests, served as a concentrated moment for marriage negotiations, and became entangled in political competition and conflict. It became a beef between ‘traditional’ Shia za’im Kamil As’ad and Musa Sadr (As’ad favoured and sponsored it), between Shia and Israel (who tried to stop it in 80s) and between Hizbullah and Amal, especially after Khamenei issued a fatwa against it in 1994 (he suggested donating blood instead). Hizbullah, in part following Iran here, put a ban on the practice and has been able to restrict its occurrence (they advocate more “symbolic” chest beating instead). For Hizbullah, the importance is the intellectual contemplation of the meaning of Ashura (cf. Deeb’s 2006a account again of the ‘modern spirituality’ that Hizbullah and other religious currents strive for and promote), not the “excessive” visceral experience of it.

However, Amal has never been so outspoken about the practice, in part because of their more strenuous relations with Iran. In fact there is a longer tendency to discredit the claim to authority of the Iranians on Shia matters, and locate Shia ‘authenticity’ rather in the Lebanese South – both for its historical pedigree as a centre for Shia learning, as well as its (more recent) vernacular practices. In fact, rather than outlawing it, Amal to some extent has identified with this popular character of the festival and, conversely, *haydar* has become associated with Amal. Historically they have tended to associate it with ‘Lebaneseness’, thus putting their best patriotic foot forward, and attempting to distinguish themselves on that score from Hizbullah, whose leadership would be ‘dictated by Iran’. Since 1997 however, after improving relations with Iran, Amal has officially tried to dissuade members from engaging in the practice, but somewhat half-heartedly so, as many (“lower-class and lower-middle-class merchant”) Amal sympathizers are still in favour of it (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 137).

Khandaq also has a march with *darb al-haydar*. In its current form, it is made possible by Amal’s close involvement. They handle security and logistics. For example, when some corner boys had attempted to set up their own ‘Hussein tent’<sup>100</sup>, Amal security guys came and took it down as it wasn’t an officially commissioned tent. Amal furthermore provided

100 A small marquee made of black cloth, where men can socialize, at times over a complimentary cup of tea. It’s the kind of ‘Ashura tent’ I entered a few months later in Zoqaq al-Blat.



the flags for the march and a good number of the (young) men walking in the procession wear Amal-provided gear (special 'skirts' that catch the blood) [see pictures on next page]. That Khandaq should have such a procession was presented to me as a unique feature. On the eve of the first day of Ashura, there was palpable excitement in the neighbourhood. In a small press distribution company, the employees called me in to the street front office where they were enjoying their daily tea break, and called my attention to the 'carnival' that was about to be unleashed onto the streets of al-Khandaq. 'You won't find anything like this anywhere else in Beirut. In Dahiyeh, somewhat. And in the South, in Nabatiyeh.' There was a slightly ironic sensationalism to what he described – to the foreign visitor – but he wasn't distancing himself from it on the whole – he was part of it. The distinction that the employee of the distribution company had made, more or less explicitly, between Khandaq and other Shia areas, was reiterated post hoc by the corner boys just mentioned, one of whom was wearing a Band-Aid on the hairline of his front, a token of his participation in *haydar*. Aware of the status of the ritual, apparently, the boys explained with some emphasis: 'you will only see *ḍarb al-haydar* here in al-Khandaq and in Nabatiyeh. Nowhere else'.

There are a number of points to be distilled from this. The most significant in the context of this chapter is that this practice of commemorating Imam Hussein's martyrdom serves to reinforce claims to the popular perspective. *Haydar* particularly marks people as deviating from proper (bourgeois, urbane) civic qualities. Many in Lebanon associate it with backwardness, with people who are not able to catch up with the times, because of their socio-economic position or their rural (in casu, Southern) background. Residents must be and appear to be clearly aware of such perceptions of the practice and of those who engage in it. Engaging in the practice, and asserting it as one's own, jibes naturally with the relative marginality that is implied in claims to the position of the ordinary man.

Let me provide two examples in which the subject position of the ordinary man is explicitly formulated and inhabited. One took place in Abu Zalem's little garden, with some of his regular clique and a guest, a former fighter in the civil war (which was also the time to which their acquaintance goes back). That whole evening was filled with tea and war talk – a recurrent topic in itself, but as old friends and colleagues reminisce, it naturally came to the foreground. Reminiscences asides though, the experience with the war always serves to extrapolate to and comment on the current political climate. Since the connection mounts back to a time when Abu Zalem was still a member of a Arab Nationalist militia, the state of Arab Nationalism (or the lack thereof) is a common frame

for such political commentary. It is also a safe ground from which to talk politics with visitors with different confessional identities. In this case, Abu Zalem jumps from a conversation about a particular battle to an indictment of the current political class, in which a socio-economic frame (rather than a sectarian frame) comes in more explicitly. Abu Zalem starts off with distancing himself radically from a well-known political figure in Lebanon, after claiming to have witnessed him run from a battle scene in downtown “like a dog”. He then rather abruptly switches to a topic that was apparently an on-going conversation in the group, namely who winds up in the national canon of revered martyrs<sup>101</sup>.

AZ: They’re phoney, all of them. And they are to be honoured? If you want to honour someone, honour Muhsen Ibrahim<sup>102</sup>. He was on the street till the last minute.

Cousin AZ: He is smart, savvy in politics.

AZ: Honour Najah Wakim<sup>103</sup>. He wore his gun and he was there on the street. Those are the ones you honour. [silence] Whatever man! Our entire history is a fraud [*tazwīr*].

Visitor: A fraud.

AZ: The hero isn’t a hero. That’s always how it goes.

Visitor: They *imprison* the hero

AZ: The hero is no hero! [To visitor:] that’s right. Just take Abu Daoud<sup>104</sup>: he died last week. He was one of the greatest heroes. He died as a concierge. Abu Daoud! He drove the Mossad crazy, drove the world crazy. He passed, Abu Daoud, and no one talked about him [asked after him].

Cousin AZ: Munich was even his doing

AZ: Samir Qassir<sup>105</sup>, now, for him, that traitor, the dog, that low-life, er, they now made *monuments* and held *commemorations* for him

Cousin AZ: They even made his statue sitting with his legs crossed [i.e. he’s sitting comfortably]

AZ: And a statue. Now who’s building a statue for Samir Qassir?

Visitor: [softly] Hariri

AZ: Now what kind of national(ist) hero (*batal qawmi*) is that? Er, Wadie

101 Recall that martyrdom is not a religious term in Arabic. It denotes the ultimate sacrifice for all sorts of communities, including the nation.

102 Secretary-General of the Leftist National Movement (see Chapter 1) and head of the Organization for Communist Action.

103 President of the People’s Movement (*ḥaraka waṭaniya*), still a minor opposition party.

104 Commander in Fatah.

105 Journalist and writer. Assassinated in 2005.



"Darb al-haydar" in Khandaq al-Ghamiq.  
 Pictures courtesy of *Hibr*  
 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hibr/albums/72157625479194917>)

Haddad dies and nobody calls for a memorial, go on and ask them, that riff-raff, they don't know who Haddad is. They don't know who Abu Daoud is. They don't know!

Cousin AZ [explains to visitor] Abu Daoud is Mohammed Aouni

AZ: Nobody knows Wadie Haddad. Nobody even mentioned him He came and went. Normally, if someone dies, they are mourning [hitting their chest], filming day and night, and they talk about his heroic feats, you won't believe your eyes [*gharibat al-shakl*]. (Conversation July 2010)

The conversation then moves into a discussion of Abu Daoud's accomplishments. After that, Abu Zalem gives one more example, of Adnan Sultani, the man who (probably under instructions of Abdel-Nasser's secret service) killed Kamel Mroueh, a Lebanese (newspaper) publisher, in 1966. A respectful, combative and fine man, a man Abu Zalem met and respected. What of his fate? He died "poor, didn't even own a car!", despite his heroic achievement and his fighting career that took him all the way to Libya.

By positing an opposition between Samir Qassir on the one hand, and Abu Daoud, Haddad and Sultani on the other – while siding with the

latter ones, Abu Zalem and his tea party position themselves at a distance from the establishment. On the one hand, Samir Qassir, (“French educated”) man of letters, editor of al-Nahar newspaper and revered intellectual in bourgeois circles: a member and representatives of the cultural and political establishment. On the other hand, heroic figures of pan-Arab movements who are considered by that same establishment as controversial actors at best (Sultani assassinated a member of that very milieu). Moreover, Abu Zalem is couching this opposition, and the critique that it implies, in class terms – his heroic figures end up as meagre members of the working classes: as ordinary men. While to Abu Zalem this is obviously an injustice – they were certainly not ordinary men – the fact that he aligns himself with them (as do his interlocutors) implies an identification with the ordinary man.

While the identification may be implicit here – implied merely by the rhetorical technique Goffman dubbed ‘footing’ – it can also be made explicit, as we can see in the second example. One of the men that he has recruited once used the following anecdote to explain why things are more precarious now (2010) than they were at the time of the ‘small civil war’ in May 2008. While those days may have had the appearance of a (sectarian) war, since then a war of a different kind has been unleashed on the Lebanese people: an economic war. Take any member of the (political) elite, he says:

*The man goes from his house – air-conditionné [French in original] – to his car – air-conditionné – to his office – air-conditionné. While the ordinary man has to step outside and wipe the sweat from his brow, work and wipe the sweat from his brow, then comes home – and there’s no electricity! The fan doesn’t work! (Interview March 2012)*

In this interview excerpt as in the conversation above, class is an explicit ground for a sense of alienation from the political and cultural centre of the nation.

Since *ḥaydar* seems to index belonging to the popular classes, engaging in it draws an embodied line under speeches like the ones above. What is important to note here, however, is that distance from cultural centres and scepticism of leadership is played out within the Shia community as well. As indicated, Hizbullah has attempted to move people away from the practice. Its politico-religious leaders and allies have done so for religious convictions (tied to questions of what spirituality is most meaningful), but it is also tied in to Hizbullah’s (not very successful) bid to national recognition and its formulation of patriotism. Each is built in part on the notion that the Resistance Society cultivates values and citizens that

form an asset to the development of Lebanon. In Shaery-Eisenlohr's words, refraining

from a practice that causes such an outcry among many non-Shi'ites in Lebanon can be viewed as one of the most successful strategies of Hizbullah positioning itself as a respectable, organized, rational, and thus capable of participation in and, in the view of Hizbullah members, of eventually leading the Lebanese nation (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 138).<sup>106</sup>

Amal by contrast does associate itself to the practice and in fact even attempts to derive some of its social and political authority from its association with such authentic 'local [Lebanese] Shia culture'. Arguably, the terms of people's notions of (national and communal) belonging and political allegiance are defined at least in part in these competing terms<sup>107</sup>. Would one judge by the adherence to and participation in the commemoration and procession, many people in Khandaq would appear to be more on Amal's side.<sup>108</sup> But it's more complicated than that. There are symbolic footholds to people's adherence that chafe against each other as people's weight shifts from one to the other. Amal is in fact widely criticized as a party. While Hizbullah is generally commended for its care of the *mahrūmīn* (which it tends to call the *mustad'afūn*, the disempowered [id: 39]), Amal is chastened for failing to do so. Moreover, Amal has traditionally identified itself as the defender of the state. (It had originally done so to make itself more acceptable across sects as the political newcomer, but it also follows directly from Sadr's focus on making the state "care" for the Shia.) While people in theory certainly also believe in the power of

106 She cites no sources to attest to that 'success' and it seems doubtful given that 'Hizbullah' and 'patriotic' or 'nationalist' are not words likely to be co-exist in any sentence uttered by non-Shia. However, Hizbullah has indeed been successful in cultivating a reputation of discipline (source of admiration and fear for many other Lebanese). Amal does not have such a reputation, which in fact reinforces its popular image. Thus altercations between Shia youth and their Sunni or Christian counterparts are usually attributed to Amal file. Amal youth are, in large part of the public eye, *zo'rān*: delinquents or thugs (source of disapprobation and fear for many other Lebanese). Class and political identity are quite close here.

107 Such competition is not merely symbolic, but takes place on a material level as well. Ashura is an occasion for Amal to cement its official claim to the neighbourhood as a political territory (official in the sense it has a near monopoly over street markers such as graffiti, flags and banners), as the organizing force behind this defining festival. It does so, however, against Hizbullah's local presence and influence in the form of its myriad (associated) welfare institutions, as well as its dominance, hitherto, of the local (mukhtar) elections.

108 This whole discussion is of course not meant to imply that participating in Ashura is only a question of political allegiance. People's participation is polyvalent. I have merely isolated this 'political' dimension.

the state and its importance, in practice as we've seen, they consider the state to fail continually. Amal's association with the state project is therefore risky (in fact, Amal is regularly seen as the corrupt party [Leenders 2005: 18; see also Picard's (1999: 15) rather bleak depiction of the party's "electoral pragmatism"]). It seems that people from Khandaq draw, more or less strategically, on these elements from either party to articulate a sense of being left out in Lebanon: the identification with the popular and lower-class, tied to Amal; and the discourse of the *mahrūm*, formulated by Sadr, abandoned by Amal (in their opinion), and honoured by Hizbullah. The sense of neglect is therefore not only the basis on which people take distance from 'the' state or hegemonic cultural centres, but also from these very same parties. It makes both Amal's failure to take care of its own and Hizbullah's honourable bourgeois Resistance Society – and its complements in a more intellectualized spirituality advocated by major spiritual leaders like Fadlallah – less palatable. The ordinary man is a generally sceptical man.

#### **Sovereignty and the politicization of state, community and citizenship**

It is time to tie a few strands together. In the previous chapter, I suggested that based on the close involvement of political parties in the everyday environment of their constituencies, one would – and it's worthwhile quoting myself here – "expect people to think and act from within a moral universe in which the political parties are a prominent fixture". We can at once confirm that suggestion *and* qualify it in two ways. We can confirm it in the sense that the political parties, their actions, clout and discourse are not merely reference points for the way people talk, but they also align themselves with the parties, their positions and discourses. The defence of the integrity of the neighbourhood, as part of the larger military strategy of Hizbullah and its allies, is one clear example. While the (neighbourhood) community was also at stake, the subsequent claim "the state doesn't enter here" implies an identification with the parties' political clout to prevent such entry. The resonance of residents' frequent invocations of the plight of the ordinary man with Amal's advocacy for the deprived and Hizbullah's care for the disempowered is a second example of that. People are part of, and speak from within, a sectarian world – that is, being a member of the Shia community is the starting point, while the parties' leadership is taken as a given.

However, it would be wrong to deduce from such alignments and resonances a wholesale and wholesome congregation of Khandaq's (Shia) residents under a sectarian canopy. There are two important qualifications to make. The first derives from the fact that people regularly inhabit

what I've been calling the subject position of the 'ordinary man'. Recall that by subject position I mean a category of personhood or social actor. 'Inhabiting' that category (discursively) can be more or less explicit – one talks of the trials of living a simple life, denounces politicians for turning a blind eye to poverty, and deplores the loss of respect and a place in society for the lower classes. Significantly, this enriches the meaning of people's qualification of their area as 'popular', *sha'bi*: as in, "of the people". More than a simple reference to simple or poor living circumstances, it is a statement of identification. The ordinary man belongs to 'the people' – a community of simple, good, but marginalized men and women. My argument is therefore that while the 'ordinary man' provides a set of stances people can take, 'the people' provides the normative firm ground upon which people can take such stances. Being 'of' the people is being part of a moral community. That means two things. On the one hand it is a way of imagining and consolidating cohesion, much in the way Durkheim thought about society (and religion as its moral community), i.e. that 'moral' was primarily about recognizing the "kinship" with others, hence accepting one's responsibility towards them (Durkheim 1995: 421, 429). On the other hand, Durkheim also posits that society, notably through the moral community of religion, endows the individual with the "faculty of idealization" – the ability to imagine an ideal society (id.: 425). In a similar fashion, the moral community of 'the people' provides semiotic, normative resources to critically evaluate, in the light of the ideals it embodies, actions and positions by both 'the state' and bureaucrats as well of each party and its politicians.

While the preceding point provides a qualification of the kind of moral universe from within which people think and act, based on the material of this chapter we can also qualify the involvement of the political parties in the neighbourhood. As discussed in the first chapter, the literature about Beirut has tended to understand that involvement as (one of the three modalities of) territorialization – of control over and the regulation of a particular space. Both the preceding and the current chapter have shown what such a political logic might look like on the ground: the political machines of which the mukhtars are a part, the partly localized operation of charity organizations<sup>109</sup> (some of which are also part of political machines), and local big men like Abu Zalem (who operates in large measure in name of the party he represents – and in smaller measure with its resources). At the same time though, what this chapter has shown

109 Localized in the sense that financial support is in part local – in the form of collecting boxes – and run by local mediators, like the mini-market operator.



so far, and this lines up with my reading of the production of space in Chapter 2, is that it would be a mistake to take such a logic as too monolithic a process. Firstly because the production of political territory occurs through a relational configuration of actors with different institutional ties, and positioned at varying 'distances' to the locality. This fractures any straight connection one might imagine between a 'party' (or 'state') and a space like a neighbourhood. It doesn't sever the connection, but much like a prism may fracture and redirect light, the different relations and nodes in the configuration involve situated agency that implicates actions that are superfluous to the reproduction of political power<sup>110</sup> and in some situations might even run contrary to its purposes.

Having mapped out this political constellation of the neighbourhood, having seen how various actors navigate it and use their experiences to construe a moral political universe, we can return to one of the main research questions of this thesis, as it was rephrased in the second chapter. In that chapter, I concluded that the conflict of interests between capital and residents, between exchange value and use value, did not seem to prompt political consciousness (let alone political action). 'Resident' did not appear to be an available category of personhood or actor, nor was residence the foundation of a moral community. In short, they did not situate the political – the fundamental questions that demand attention by the political community – in the (sectarian) territory. In this chapter, it becomes clearer where residents of Khandaq *do* situate the political. Rather than over conflict over space, they situate it at the contentious intersection of state, community and citizenship. They debate questions of state authority over the lives of Khandaq residents and link these questions to the converse autonomy of the community. They also evaluate the claims to communal representation and form negotiated and unsteady allegiances to those who make those claims. Such debates take place in a complex figuration of manifestations of state presence and power (like the mukhtar, or incursions by the army), local defiance of such presence and power (by squatting or keeping the police out), as well as means of social regulation and the provision of means of subsistence that are ideologically framed as going against or making up for the lack of state prerogatives (Abu Zalem's network, charity organizations). In other words, contrary to most sociology of Beirut at least since Nasr (1990) and Khalaf & Khoury (1993b), who put space and territory at the very centre of the

<sup>110</sup> Defined here as electoral loyalty and the felicity of the resultant claim to legitimate representation by a political party on the 'political scene' (i.e. the stage on which all representatives of constituencies and partisan interests perform).



imagination of the social fabric and political competition, space and territory are in fact merely instrumental for thinking about these more important preoccupations.

The key political question therefore appears to be one about sovereignty. Now, such political questions - of (checks on) authority of the State over its citizens - have also seen their theoretical translations. Of particular note is a (post-structuralist thought) analytical project centred on the question whether, and if so how, states can "capture" their citizens, or whether the latter retain some "autonomy", and if so, of what nature. This kind of question has been posed and answered with strong Foucauldian overtones in Western contexts, with a focus on how subjects and subjectivities have been encapsulated in the (discursive and 'structural') discipline of state (and market) projects. Foucault has certainly also been applied to colonies and their successors (prominently by Ann Stoler and Jon Mitchell), but as Hansen and Stepputat (2006: 3, 19f.) argue, statecraft in the colonies tended to take on forms quite different from those in the 'mother countries'. They construe the two different tendencies as 'disciplinary' and 'spectral'. The spectral would be characterized not by the routine encapsulation into disciplinary structures, but by incidental spectacular violence, to instil general compliance, and rule by proxy, with significant margin for (more) 'local' power-brokers and regulatory practices. Subsequently, the premise is that such colonial rule has also conditioned the kind of post-colonial rule exercised within the independent nation. Contemporary post-colonial states would then be characterized by 'uneven' or 'layered' sovereignty, in which local powers, whose authority is 'informal' (i.e., 'unofficial', implicit, sometimes personal) or derives strength precisely from being at the intersection of informal and formal<sup>111</sup> (i.e. 'official', state) positions, have considerable leeway.

Recently, in order to understand such figurations of sovereignty, Deleuze and Guattari turn up more and more often as references for an analytical repertoire that could function as an alternative to Foucault's. Whereas Foucault arguably focused his attention on, and developed his vocabulary towards, the 'closure' of systems of rule, Deleuze and Guattari were animated by a revolutionary desire for change and focused their analyses on the study of fissures and instability in seemingly closed and fixed apparatuses of power. Deleuze and Guattari's writings have become conceptual sources for those in need of a language to talk about contexts characterized by non-closed apparatuses of power, like those in cases of 'uneven sovereignty', as well as to foreground individuals' agentic scope.

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111 I come back to uses and abuses of these twin terms.

Deleuzean analyses then pick a different angle from which to relate to the tension between the twin notions of 'state capture' and 'citizen autonomy', or in other words, to questions of sovereignty.

Now, the situation in Khandaq lines up quite closely with such an idea of fractured sovereignty. Can this new literature premised on Deleuze and Guattari's revolutionary analyses of statecraft help us understand the nature of political relations in Khandaq in a meaningful way? Specifically, can it help us understand the tension and alternation between the two predominant ways in which people understand political relations themselves – that is, either through a discourse of neglect or a discourse of defiance?

**Sovereignty, space and citizenship in the postcolony** An influential account of state-citizen relations in post-colonial, urban contexts is Simone's (2004; 2011; in particular 2010). He draws clearly (though not explicitly) on 'Deleuzean' thought to do so, and – as my indicative Deleuzean frame immediately above would suggest – he emphasizes the instability in these relations. He investigates coping strategies by ordinary people and/or marginalized populations and the means at their disposal to deploy them. Key to such strategies, Simone claims, is the ability to evade positions assigned to them by state policy schemes and the attempts to police such schemes, if such positions would turn out disadvantageous to them (which they often do, as the interest of marginal groups tend not to be the basis of policy formulations). Simone calls the coping strategies by relatively marginal (urban) citizens "anticipatory politics", a form of action as well as a kind of disposition, in which people attempt to "stay one step ahead of what might come, prepared to make a move" in order to "mitigate their exploitation" (2010: 62), whether that be on the labour market or by political institutions. Their moves could be qualified as slipping through the (institutional) cracks whenever one appears or stepping into a (political or economic) gap whenever one opens up.

His analysis tends to juxtapose two kinds of actors, each associated with a kind of logic of action. On the one hand are economic and state agencies and on the other you have people 'on the periphery'. This distinction draws on a Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology<sup>112</sup> in that it follows the latter's juxtaposition of the rhizome and the tree that guides their analysis of

112 If not a direct influence, then at least mediated through Manuel DeLanda's reading of Deleuze & Guattari: see Charles Lemert's indication to that extent in the preface (Simone 2010: xi).

pretty much everything in *Thousand Plateaus*. Very briefly summarized, Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of the rhizome<sup>113</sup> as the key to a different worldview, one that takes into account 1) the multiplicity of connections between every thing (whether of mind or of matter) as well as the multiplicity of aspects or components that make (up) that thing; and 2) that these connections and compositions are, always, albeit to different degrees, unstable. All in all then, they warn against too simply or quickly assuming the identity of any thing. A view that too easily or quickly does so is 'arboreal' or 'arborescent' – tree-like. An arborescent perspective knows where a thing comes from (it can be traced back to its 'roots') and what it is (it fits into schemas of categorization, much like a genealogy). Deleuze and Guattari, however, are "tired of trees" (1987: 15). They propose *Thousand Plateaus* as a rhizomatic reading of reality and apply such a reading to a wide variety of cases, including political relations – or more accurately, state-society relations. Within these relations, arboreal logics are attributed to the State, which seeks to fix subjects and identities, and the rhizome to the 'noise' that inevitably accompanies the arboreal institutions of the state, the irreducible multiplicity of relations and actors in society that no institution can quite contain.

Simone transposes this analytical model onto the urban (and in particular the 'post-colonial' urban). In this view, the city presents an incredible diversity of actors and actions and offers new opportunities and possible shifts at every corner (the rhizomatic quality of city life); yet capital and state put in place infrastructures that are supposed to regulate and stabilize this diversity, to keep it 'in line' (the arborescent quality of governance), which it always fails to do some extent. Especially the anticipatory politics from the 'periphery' actively keeps urban denizens out of the line set out by various levels of government. This approach resonates with and has itself influenced recent trends in urban studies.

There are two notable strands of scholarship that have drawn on Simone's framework, in more and less overt and direct ways. On the one hand, you have scholars of the urban in the global south. Some of these scholars frame their work as concerning the postcolonial and cite other prominent names from this eclectic tradition, like Partha Chatterjee, Achille Mbembe, or Edgar Pieterse, whereas others tend to stick with more developmentist frames (like North and South) and include other authors in their referential packages, such as Jennifer Robinson and Arjun Appadurai. The main idea though is that the 'informality' found in cities in 'the South' should

113 The reader will recall that a rhizome is a kind of root that can horizontally shoot off new stems, which are themselves capable of sustaining new plants elsewhere.

be the basis to rethink our urban ontologies (and epistemologies [see e.g. Pieterse 2009, Mbembe & Nuttal 2004]), inspiration for which these scholars find in Simone's work. On the other hand, you have a body of work that comes out of an approach to the city broadly inspired by the tradition of STS. While some scholars stick to more conventional – let's say, Latourian – STS approaches, others seek to incorporate a Deleuzian perspective (for which Simone is seen to have made an important contribution), where the latter's conceptualization of the 'assemblage' is put into conversation with that notion as it has been influenced by Latour's work. While these two strands clearly diverge on essential concerns and conceptual traditions, they converge on an emphasis on creativity over routine, of chaos over order, and rupture over structure<sup>114</sup>. While certain among them (e.g., Gandy 2005, Ghertner 2011) warn against neglecting 'structural' factors, the analytical thrust is to show how informality creates openings (albeit fleeting ones) for people to work around 'structures', and generate new possibilities of action (e.g., McFarlane 2012; Bach 2010; Matlon 2013).

**Understanding power: arborescent parties, rhizomatic citizens?** The question is if this analysis of the (inter)play of capture and evasion, informality and indeterminacy helps us understand the nature of political relations in Khandaq. How would it help us to trace the networks of state, religious and party actors that residents navigate, and understand the way they conceive of their citizenship in the nation? The chapter presented various ('material') practices of social regulation as well as the provisioning of resources. In terms of the latter aspect, we have seen that housing is a crucial resource *and* stake in relations between constituencies and political representatives – political blocs confront each other over housing and it constitutes an important favour or resource that people plead for with party representatives and local big men. Yet housing is merely one of the more important (because most scarce) material resources that can be redistributed and exchanged – others include jobs, discounts for services, (alimentary) products, and administrative procedures and interventions. There are a number of people that one can go to – a local or central contact at a charity organization, the neighbourhood strongman, a local party representative or designated party functionary, or the mukhtar. These

114 The core of the idea is of course a much older one. Unpredictability has been taken as defining of city life by, famously, Simmel, and with him (Levine et al. 1976; Lindner 1996) the early Chicago School; in part the Manchester anthropological studies of African urbanism; and Sennett.

people each have their position within the political playing field and the exchanges of services with them subsequently (re-)embed – one might say capture – people in certain kinds of ‘political’ relations.

Something similar holds for instances and practices of social regulation. Different players – the army or military police, strongmen, mukhtars – may preserve social order or guard norms of conduct. Through their interventions, each player marks people in relation to certain symbolically identified centres of power and authority (the State, the political party). These ‘marks’ may be subtle, not always verbalized or otherwise explicit, but occasional explications (like in the discourse of defiance or neglect) indicate that such symbolic stakes are in fact at stake. Yet, even when explicated, the understandings people have of the relations they maintain, and meanings of the practices (of exchange) they engage in, are not unequivocal. This chapter has also shown that people’s positions towards (sectarian) community, state, nation and party are ambiguous, or at least, contextual and shifting.

I come back to these discursive positionings below. First though, I want to extend my Deleuzo-Simonean view map of these material practices of regulation and provisioning in Khandaq. Take Subhi and Abu Kassem from Chapter 2, for example, who sought their residential refuge in the grey zone of illicit and illegal housing. The most obvious calque would be to view them as inhabiting or following rhizomatic logics, by sneaking through the cracks and trespassing onto illegal territory. The representative of arborescence would be – like it was for Deleuze and Guattari – the state, delineating where and how people may live. Less obvious are local strongmen like Abu Zalem and the (virtually present) political parties that back up an Abu Zalem’s work and, with some likelihood, also dissuade official authorities from clamping down on illegal squats such as the Khatib building. That presents something of an analytical problem for the dichotomous analytical frame. While both strongman and party aid residents in their ‘rhizomatic’ evasion of state-imposed order, they also articulate these residents within the territorial complex of a party’s electoral machine. A simple rhizome-tree opposition therefore does not quite seem to work.

It is in fact questionable whether the picture painted by Simone in his programmatic 2010 introduction (‘On Cityness’) – while mixing Deleuzian colours onto his analytical palette – is able to do justice to his own more detailed analyses he presents later in the book. There also, there are different kinds of capture, through different modes and levels of governance. For instance, in the first chapter, which develops the theme of anticipatory politics and zooms in on Jakarta’s northern periphery, he

discusses relations not wholly unlike those we've seen in Beirut. There is also a big man figure, the *preman*, who acts as an intermediary between largely irregular residents and more powerful actors. He does so in part thanks to his intimate knowledge of a formally excluded group of people. The mediation, however, does not 'free' people from the designs that the economic and political elites have for the land they live on – it binds them instead to certain compromises – compromises that yield relative advantages, but binding ones nonetheless. The *preman* himself also often becomes part of the local state (a sort of *mukhtar*) to mediate official and informal citizenship in ways that fit his own (financial) designs (such as selling much needed state-ID cards). The focus on the creative over the fixed in Simone's conceptual outlines<sup>115</sup> therefore seems at least partially misplaced, relative to his own case. In the following, I trace the misfit back to problems with the Deleuzian (more properly speaking, Deleuzo-Guattarian) perspective that inspired his conceptual work.

A first problem is the (rhetorical) operationalization of the arboreal by the focus on the state. Despite Guattari's experiences with anti-institutional (one could have said, anti-arboreal) struggles in psychiatry, Deleuze and Guattari's writing itself seems to select the state as the prime target for their analysis of the nefarious effects of arborescent thought and practice. This follows up from their joint work for the first volume of the Capitalism and Schizophrenia project, *Anti-Oedipus*, (1983) which presents a similar kind of analysis (*Thousand Plateaus* is its second volume). The key stake in *Anti-Oedipus* is subjectivation in its relation to desire – that is, how the psychic apparatus is constituted. That has significant consequences for how they construe the state. Playing off major Lacanian psychoanalytical insights of the time, they combine the Freudian idea that becoming a person (subjectivation) depends on where desire can be invested (see *Civilization and its Discontents*) and the semiological-structuralist notion that the assignment of meaning is crucial to operations of culture (cf. Levi-Strauss et al.), a mix to which they add a more materialist consideration of power and institutions (the Foucauldian moment). They thus posit that what may be desired depends on how a thing is named and whether it is subsequently proscribed or allowed: 'what is what' and 'how should one relate to it'. Consequently, the state is treated primarily in terms of its ability to 'code', i.e. to fix meaning for its subjects<sup>116</sup> (and only secondarily

115 See for example: "[U]rban life in [the cities dealt with in this book] largely relies upon wits, psychological maneuvers, small escapades, and impulse" (2010: 2).

116 The focus or emphasis in *Anti-Oedipus* and *Thousand Plateaus* on categories of identity, that is, on the ascription of 'names' or subject positions to 'things' and 'people' in their understanding of power fits squarely in the realm of identity politics that emerged in the 1960s and

in terms of a disciplinary apparatus built up around such coding). This dimension of state power is less interesting to our purposes here, and we won't take it into account, but it's important to note that their reflections on the role of the state come out of their interrogation of the historical specificity of statehood, which they locate in its ability to over-code identities (human, nonhuman) and their reciprocal relations (i.e., to name and proscribe) that had been assigned by 'communities' (non-state social groupings, like tribes). This superior coding power later seems to motivate their near exclusive identification and critique of arborescent structures in the state in *Thousand Plateaus* (as the prime organism to make use of or to be constituted by such power<sup>117</sup>). In *Thousand Plateaus* that coding power translates into the concept of centralization. They use that concept both to extrapolate their semiological thought from *Anti-Oedipus* (the State as the central Signifier) and to explore different modes of social organization. Concerning that last aspect, the state's arborescence manifests in its tendency to centralize, to structure and orient societal institutions and subjects in relation to itself, the centre. As a corollary it rigidifies social boundaries, as these boundaries become redefined in relation to the more powerful centre.<sup>118</sup>

I revisit the nature of these boundaries below. For now, the contours of the first problem become apparent. From the Khandaq examples above, it is clear that it's not only the state that tries to stabilize relations and fix people – a powerful civil society institution such as the political party in Lebanon tries to do the same thing. People turn for help directly to someone who is allied to a political party – in the most prominent case here, Abu Zalem, who is a part of Hizbullah's organizational complex – or they are aware that their breach of the law is premised in part on the ability of political parties to provide cover and negotiate state policing of the law, as with the Khatib building. Such awareness falls in line with people's perception of the territorial, and thus political, integrity of party

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1970s (*Anti-Oedipus* was written as an explicit reaction to Paris, May '68; *Thousand Plateaus* as a more cautious follow-up after the '70s). (See also Buchanan's [2008: 13f.] characterization of the consensus among [French] theorists about the nature of power.)

117 Of course, the logic can be found in any place, and they see it for example in the postulates of (Chomskyan) linguistics, but in terms of their socio-political analyses, they relate it primarily to the state 'and its derivatives' (cf. 1983: 252).

118 Such an idea does not deviate far from Marxist thought of the time, if the importance that Lefebvre (e.g. 1991: 331) accorded to centralizing powers is any indication. It is plausible that the French state's myth of its own centrality (manifesting itself in far-reaching concentration of decision-making and regulatory practices in Paris) has fed into the sociological imagination of thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari. (At least, we will see that their idea of the [symbolically or materially] all-powerful State looks curious in other contexts, where centralization is neither myth nor praxis.)

power. It obliges people – to a certain extent – to reciprocate in the form of electoral loyalty or other signs of partisan commitment. From the party's standpoint, this is precisely the function of such support (if not its sole purpose): it strengthens its bonds with its constituency. From a simple rhizome-tree opposition, the paradox here is that people's enlistment in a political identity or camp entails – or creates the conditions of – the possibility for people to evade attempts at stabilizations by the state. That paradox should entail a reconsideration of the specifics of Deleuze and Guattari's sociological sketches in terms of the presence of – and relations between – arboreal institutions, as well as a reappraisal of the epistemological value of the notion of the rhizome: problem number two.

**Of states and war machines: challenges to sovereignty** Let's first pause for a moment longer over the multiplicity of arborescent institutions (or 'organisms'), their reciprocal relations, and the consequences for our understanding of the state (especially as related to the idea of sovereign governance). In order to judge these elements at their proper value, let's revisit Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the State, which they identify with sovereignty (and vice versa, on the whole). In extrapolation of their sketch of statehood in *Anti-Oedipus*, sovereignty lies in the state's capacity to re-orient all social relations and values to itself as their primary reference point.<sup>119</sup> In *Thousand Plateaus*, they refer to this as the interiority of the state and the process of interiorisation takes places through the twin dynamics of "capture" and "appropriation" (a capacity which they also denote by "domination"). In ambition, interiority – sovereignty – is total: any territory the state has captured and claimed as its own, it over-codes or appropriates to its purposes.

Contrary to what one might have expected based on their characterization of the state as the great centralizer, they do recognize the state never quite fulfils this ambition. In other words they do recognize the fragility of the state (a staple insight from the anthropological study of the state). What is striking though, and this is the point I'd like to draw attention to here, is that in their analytics, the state's sovereignty is only ever questioned by its radical other. The logic of interiority is defied by the logic of exteriority, which in the immediate co-text they call the war machine (thus, interiority : exteriority :: arborescent : rhizomatic :: capture : war machine). By definition this precludes the possibility that other arbores-

<sup>119</sup> In *Anti-Oedipus* they work with the term, but in a rather taken-for-granted manner – its deployment is more suggestive than analytical. The authors make more of it in *Thousand Plateaus*.



cent institutions or organizations can challenge the sovereign operation of the state's law. For Deleuze & Guattari, such organizations have in fact been captured and overcoded (and thus work to strengthen state-derived order – “political parties, literary movements, psychoanalytic associations, families, conjugal units, etc.” [1987: 116]). Interestingly, when they do acknowledge the fragility of the state by pointing to its unwieldy nature, as an organism with its various institutional and bureaucratic manifestations that, one would readily assume, are bound to enter into conflict with each other, they insist these organizations can only challenge state sovereignty when they turn their *modus operandi* from arborescent to war machinic, if only for a while (as examples they mention lobbyists and labour [union] conflicts).

What challenges sovereignty therefore is what evades it – what remains ‘outside’ of it<sup>120</sup>. The exterior might be constituted by a network of relations that extend beyond the territory of the state (the multinational corporation, international religious orders) or “local” mechanisms such as those of “bands, margins, and minorities” that assert their rights in spite of or against the state's imposed order (1987: 358ff.). The war machine that challenges the state are the relations that cannot be appropriated by, and for the good use of, the state, relations that defy the codes (identities, classification) and interpellations by the state. It is a refusal or incapacity of staying fixed, identical to the norm. The real challenge to sovereignty lies not primarily in the defiance of those codes, but in the automatic implication that the right itself of the state to capture and overcode the band or minority is in question (the judicial aspect of state dominion Deleuze and Guattari are attentive to<sup>121</sup>).

So the analytical problem becomes immediately clear: it is curious that Deleuze & Guattari posit that the state's claim to territorial sovereignty could only fail in its inability to domesticate what is formally different from itself. At the very least, the ethnographic case from Khandaq shows that organizations formally akin to the state, like a political party, could effectively disable state mechanisms of capture or even dispute its territorial claims. Yet, one might counter, does Abu Zalem, as a local strongman, not significantly resemble the “chiefs” that ran the bands that Deleuze and Guattari imagine as the principle war machines? Recall that (on the

120 “The law of the State is [...] that of interior and exterior. The State is sovereignty. But sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally.” (1987: 360)

121 See also Toscano (2005: 40): “State capture defines a domain of legitimate violence, in as much as it always accompanies capture *with the affirmation of a right to capture*” (my emphasis).

basis of their reading of Pierre Clastres' analyses of pre-state politics), Deleuze and Guattari identified the band or the tribe as that form of social organization that is (was) bound to remain rhizomatic: not only because, as autonomously functioning, nomadic groups, they were hard to domesticate by an external state power (such as a colonial state), but also because the power of the tribe's military heads was always kept in check internally by the tribe, so that these heads always had to play "move by move" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 35) and hence were unable to transcend the tribe to become a 'central' (centralizing) power.

Is Abu Zalem not the same? He is the big man who leaves no bureaucracy of his own. Moreover, he keeps the state at bay, when necessary. Not only does the ethnographic examples show he functions a point of passage in citizens' rhizomatic evasions (take, for example, Abu Hussein's squat on state ground), he can also be shown to effectively dispute the state's claim to sovereignty, understood as "a domain of legitimate violence". If one takes Anwar's case, the young man reportedly wanted by police, but whose freedom within the neighbourhood had been guaranteed by Abu Zalem, it effectively presents a negotiation of the legitimacy of state intervention in the neighbourhood territory. It's not an absolute negation, as some boisterous (and mostly young) claims would want it, but still relative and locally significant. To equate on this basis Abu Zalem with a Clastrean chief, however, is problematic because Abu Zalem is in fact tied to, and his authority is in part dependent on, the 'arborescent' structure of a political party.

I believe this points to more fundamental problems with the dichotomy, ones that also showed in Simone's trouble in conceptually capturing the complex relations of mediation in the north of Jakarta. In the following section, I propose an alternative to the dichotomy, but before getting to that, I would like to close this section with two related points. The first concerns the notion of territorialized politics in Beirut. Towards the end of the first part of this chapter, I suggested we qualify how such 'territorialized' politics might actually work, because it depends on relations between actors that have different ties to the locality (i.e., the 'territory'). The subsequent discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's work allows us to frame that configuration of relations as a question of how to understand the relation between space ('territory'), sovereignty and its logic of 'capture'.

We can see Abu Zalem as an ethnographic example of how state sovereignty may be limited by locally, i.e. geographically limited, rooted centres of power. While Abu Zalem does not operate like the leader of a band, the fact that he is 'local' is essential to his position. Thus, there is some-

thing more fundamental in Deleuze & Guattari's analytical intuitions that rings true – even if their logical extrapolations take them to a somewhat alien social ontology. Their analytical intuition was that state power operates through a kind of de-territorialization of more locally bound forms of sociality and power. 'Primitive' society (the bands and tribes) operate on the basis of a closer vital connection to its material environment, which is an inherent part of the social process. The state breaks such a link by institutionalizing a form of social regulation that derives from a legislative and bureaucratic centre, removed (physically and logically) from the immediate environment. The state, in other words, has a (fundamentally) different relation to the territory it governs than the bands. Now, where their analysis starts to break down is when they assert that such a primitive territoriality (let's not fuss over words here<sup>122</sup>) may only be maintained in the war machine, categorically separating the rhizome and the tree. By empirical contrast, we see that people's induction into something of a political constituency (arborescence) depends precisely on a closer link to the material environment (which should have been rhizomatic). Both the Lebanese state and a political party like Hizbullah are large-scale complex organizations, whose decision-making or legislative 'centres' are relatively far-removed, though certainly to different degrees, from the spaces of everyday living of its citizens or constituency. The power of someone like Abu Zalem – and hence his use for an organization like Hizbullah – is that he is precisely tightly linked to a space – a territory – and hence has more of a grip on unstable everyday living.

So while in principle Deleuze & Guattari's perspective fits well with an attention to the networked nature of the workings of power, their conceptual understanding of the state and its sovereignty is patchy. This becomes readily apparent if one mirrors it to Hansen & Stepputat's (2006) distinction between spectral and disciplinary power, mentioned earlier. The former modality is geared at exploitation and general compliance of the population, the other at regulation and constitution of the population. The latter implies close involvement of state apparatuses in everyday life, the first implies rule by proxy. While these are merely ideal typifications<sup>123</sup>, in 1960s and '70s France it was perhaps easier to see disciplinary encapsulation as the inherent tendency of state operations and the

122 Though I may point out here that it comes close to what many contemporary authors would designate with 'informality'. Because of the close affinity between these two terms – primitive territoriality and informality – one can also say that contemporary Deleuzean analyses start to break down at a very similar point as well. Cf. *infra*.

123 It doesn't mean there's no discipline in the spectral post-colony, and no spectrality and fracture in the metropolitan centre.

progressive realization of state power. It was easier to assume the state penetrating ('disciplining') all aspects of society, and to consider civil society organizations ("political parties, literary movements, psychoanalytic associations, families, conjugal units, etc." [1987: 116]) "captured" and "overcoded", as mere continuations and consolidations of the state-derived order. However, if Deleuze & Guattari had ventured out of the metropolitan regions they probably would have noticed that such a tendency is not inherent at all, and that such organizations may in fact form counterpoints to state pretensions of authority and claims to power (they did avidly read the anthropology of the time – notably Clastres – but the discipline hadn't yet moved on to questions of contemporary statehood). The implication – and this is the second point – is a different reading of state power. It doesn't have to be sovereign (having 'captured' social and political relations) to be powerful. In the ideal-typical post-colony, as well as to a certain extent in neighbourhoods like Khandaq, we must conclude that sovereignty is fractured and 'incomplete'; yet that doesn't mean that power is ineffective. The above example suggests that it may very well be preserved, through the chain of somewhat autonomously operating passage points. But far from wanting to provide a neat functionalist account, it could also be otherwise. The breakdown of relations between za'ims and qabadays in old Sunni Beirut during the war (see Chapter 3) is an example of the fact that functional benefit is no guarantee for reproduction. Local powers can get away from under the grip of larger power blocs (such as parties). Residents' ambiguity about state rule and political leadership point to something similar: there are largely successful and functional claims to authority, but everyday life is still 'unruly' and may wind up constituting a challenge to these claims, when the winds of change pick up. At the end of the chapter I come back to the link between the unruliness of residents' ambiguity and what it shows about sovereignty in Khandaq, but before that I develop this conception of a fractured but functional sovereignty in more conceptual detail, addressing the shortcomings of Deleuze & Guattari's dichotomy in capturing such a conception.

**Lines of code, articulations of power: molar, molecular, and flight** To recap: we have to preserve some of the truthiness of Deleuze & Guattari's intuitions, but avoid the alien in their social ontology. For now, we can at least conclude that the arborescent cannot only be attributed to the state, or state-captured and state-derived institutions. The arboreal is multiple and different organizations are in competition with each other for control. While I have not challenged the notion of the arboreal per se –

it is a heuristically useful concept with which to think about what power actually might be – I have complicated the picture relative to *Thousand Plateaus* in terms of where one might find arborescent logics in operation. The rhizome, by contrast, turns out to be a more fundamentally problematic notion. Rhizomatic citizens, or at least their strategies, are – in some cases – rhizomatic only relative to one arborescent structure or attempt at control: it's not that citizens evade fixation per se, that they are always on the move (the implication Simone and others have drawn from *Thousand Plateaus*), but that they may evade one kind of fixation – only to assume another one. Granted, Deleuze and Guattari recognize this – “no de-territorialization without [...] re-territorialization” (1987: 303) – but their insistence on the ontological (not relative but absolute) status of the rhizome does invite further reflection on the value of the concept as such. Therefore I want to explore a triplet set of notions Deleuze and Guattari also employ, perhaps less well-known than the rhizome-tree dichotomy, that one can employ to address the problematic aspects of the dichotomy. These triplet concepts are the molar, the molecular and the flight. Deleuze and Guattari speak of ‘lines’ here (for what I have been calling ‘logics’) such that there is the molar line, the molecular line and, most famously, the line of flight. The line of flight is actually often (rhetorically more than axiomatically) equated with the rhizome, but Deleuze and Guattari are not unequivocal about that relation and one could argue equally well that both the molecular and the flight cover what they call rhizome elsewhere. In fact, that's what I'll argue, because I believe it will help our understanding of the rhizome's relative quality. The molar for all intents and purposes is the arborescent. Deleuze & Guattari define the molar – taking inspiration from its use in biology for that which qualifies the perspective of wholes or aggregates – as that which identifies and imposes, codes and structures. What these lines articulate (“conjugate”) are so-called segments, such as social classes or genders. Molecular operations also conjugate. What sets apart them apart from the molar line is the measure of rigidity of their codings and structuration. The segmentation of molecular lines is “supple”: connections are variable, and importantly, cross-cut the (often binary) segmentation of the molar aggregate of which molecular segments are a (diverging) part. The molar and molecular are perfectly able to co-exist leaving each other intact. To take the human body as the appropriate example, it is whole from a molar perspective, but criss-crossed by all sorts of activities and shot through with interstitial spaces on a ‘molecular’ level. Molecular divergences of molar segmentarity do not in themselves hurt the molar whole. They might cause “blockages” to the molar system, but usually there is a sort of a compromise that keeps

the molar line operative as a whole. However the molecular is also one step towards the line of flight. The suppleness of molecular line creates openings that might give cause to a “run-off” – a line of flight. A new pathway, a new connection or relation that defies all segment relationality. Most likely it will be reterritorialized into a segmentation at some point, but by then it may have effected a change to the extant set of categories and their relations. Deleuze & Guattari sum up the different logics as follows: “The line of rigid segmentarity with molar breaks; the line of supple segmentation with molecular cracks; the line of flight or rupture, abstract, deadly and alive, nonsegmentary” (1987: 200).

It seems as if this intermediary and mediating category, which divides the rhizome into two different manifestations, is what we need to map out the set of relations we see in Khandaq. While people’s attempts to live in the margins and the gaps of state sovereignty undermines the ‘molar’ grip of the state, it’s not quite a rhizome in the sense of the war machine type, i.e. in the sense of a line of flight. The rhizomatic evasion by citizens is more accurately molecular, in that it represents the flexibility of shifting allegiances, never real escapes, always within the boundaries of the known. (And of course this map includes the important addition of more than one molar system, a systemic complexity that precisely creates the conditions of possibility for molecular shifts, jumps and infidelities). It is *not* rhizomatic in the sense of Deleuze & Guattari’s famous introduction to *Thousand Plateaus* (1987: 21) of the rhizome as ‘anti-memory’, i.e. that which isn’t reproduced. Most lives are quite routine, lived within the contours of arboreal identities, roughly along the ‘rigid’ lines of molarity. This brings me to the last point. Deleuze & Guattari, and Simone in their footsteps, seem to idealize somewhat the diversity and instability of rhizomatic living. For both, the paradigmatic expression of the rhizome appears to be the line of flight (not the molecular). For Deleuze and Guattari the idealization presumably follows their larger political engagements, hoping as they are to stimulate molecular lines to free themselves as much as possible from molar lines (that is, to encourage May ‘68 energies to liberate themselves from all kinds of fascism). As for Simone, the emphasis in his programmatic conceptualization of the (postcolonial) city is analytical in nature and hence more curious. For if the line of flight is the paradigmatic expression of the rhizome, then it doesn’t seem very determinative of city life (despite the fact Simone situates it at the very heart of “cityness”): changes to how cities ‘work’ are rare. The confusion may be due to different levels of analysis: from an individual’s point of view one may well see little lines of flight people seize on to make ends meet – to an individual a city may indeed present itself, at least in part,

as diverse and unpredictable<sup>124</sup>. But the disruptive quality of that line of flight – the ultimate stake in *Thousand Plateaus* – is limited to say the least. It doesn't lead to unpredictability on a 'systemic' level – usually, mostly – even though it has that potential. The progressive autonomy of the qabadays during the civil war is one example where the latter actually 'ran off' from the established exchanges<sup>125</sup>.

Two lessons emerge. If rhizomatic noise defines city life, then one should understand the rhizome initially as the "ambiguity" of the molecular level. The concept allows one to take inspiration from Deleuze & Guattari and heed their call to not take habitual (molar) categories for granted and stay attentive to the possible (which logically is as much a part of social reality as that which is 'already manifest'), while steering clear from the pitfall of fanciful theorization of indeterminacy (that Gandy 2005 and Ghertner 2011 also warned against). In practice that means Deleuze-inspired approaches should steer clear from a fixation with the opposition between rhizome and the tree. The second lesson is the converse of the first – while staying attentive to the possible, we also have to ask how we should think the regularity and stability of most social structure, including 'informality'. You can't talk about interstices without also talking about the structures they interstitial to, to play off Simone. We already have the outlines of a more coherent theory of territoriality to address that question from within an urban sociological perspective. From that perspective, we can see territoriality as a modality of power through which the molar order is made to stick, even as supple subversions of that order are given some room for play.

**Conclusion** In this conclusion, I look back and synthesize the main themes and propositions of this chapter, and I look forward to what the remaining section should bring. To start with a look back, in the first part I presented the discursive shifts and ambivalences in the way 'the people' in Khandaq talks about relations of state, community and party (leadership). Having concluded the second part of the chapter, we can now see their full analytical significance. They are actually an important key to understanding how sovereignty 'works' in Lebanon, and arguably in

124 Even if individual 'revolutions' are also still rare. Certain individuals may be more predisposed to these kinds of experiences, people in practical or existential transience, like migrants or students.

125 One could see another example in the Arab Spring: the line of flight was virtually present for a longer period in the political economy and social contract of each country (see e.g. al-Ghobashy 2011). (The 'reterritorializations' within the old order – only partially affected – are also illustrative of most lines of flight.)

post-colonial societies more generally (as per Hansen & Stepputat). The alternation between the two discursive frames I dubbed ‘defiance’ and ‘neglect’ through which people talk about their relation to the Lebanese state occurs in the ‘room for play’ they have to (“strategically”, *pace* Simone) draw upon the resources of the state and civil society institutions that are ideologically understood to be in competition with the state (Hizbullah or religious charity as compensations for the shortcomings of the state). Exchanges with such institutions also imply, to different extents, practical and ideological alignments. Similarly, the scepticism they formulate towards party and religious (i.e., sectarian) leadership gives some symbolic form to the “anticipation” that defines their everyday disposition – watching out for changes in the political constellation that may have consequences for them, much like the ordinary people that populate Simone’s book. Ultimately then, these discursive frames, and the scepticism that undergirds them, point to the nature of sovereignty. It’s not that ‘(so and so) people do not recognize the authority of the state’ and that ‘party so and so form a state within a state’, as one can recurrently hear in Lebanon, on the streets as much as in the press and public interventions by intellectuals. That would miss the point. (Competing) ‘molar’ forms of organizations constitute a layered and uneven figuration of effective power and provisioning, which forms an experiential basis upon which people (continually) give shape to their – equally layered – position on (state or party) authority (drawing on historically formed discourses of nationhood and communal identity, of course).

In terms of Deleuzo-Guattarian (inspired) frameworks and vocabularies, in so far as terms like “evasion” and “capture” flag a dynamic in how citizen-subjects and state institutions relate to each other (their heuristic value), we need to emphasize their relative nature. Evasion – by economically and legally marginal people – in fact is most likely to be navigation between multiple (‘arborescent’) logics of capture and, concomitantly, capture remains in fact partial or tentative. The ambivalence people show towards both the state (denouncing its shameful neglect as much as boasting defiance against it) and towards political leadership of the confessional community (aligning with certain principles it stands for but distancing from others) reveal the problematic nature both of a romance of rhizome as well as the premise of centralizing (state) power.

This brings me to two related points about the nature of ‘informality’ (the space of anticipatory politics, or rhizomatic, primitive territorialities, if you want to stay closer to Deleuze & Guattari). First, the emphasis on unpredictability or indeterminacy in this understanding of informality is too strong. Deleuze & Guattari themselves are ambiguous in this respect



– they claim one thing (the rhizome gets subsumed back into the arboreal) but largely do another (they’re more interested in the rhizome than in the arboreal) – so one might be forgiven for reading them in a way that emphasizes indeterminacy, and constructing one’s analytical framework on that premise. Still, to read them that way probably requires other ontological commitments, within which such an emphasis feels natural. Some of those commitments may derive from the urban sociological tradition. The emphasis on the unpredictability that runs from Simmel to Sennett reverberates here with radicalized Deleuzean overtones, in which the rhizomatic relative nature becomes something more absolute, as a property that gets incarnated in certain people or spaces, hypostatized into something we call informality. However, as we’ve seen, that perspective doesn’t really do justice to what we’ve seen here (and even in Simone). We have to understand this ‘space’ of informality instead as structured, organizing and ordering people’s lives. In this case, we see that both state and political party are pervasively present in people’s everyday lives, structuring (over-determining if you want to play with words) what is possible and what is not.

However, one might counter, isn’t this precisely Simone et. al’s point? ‘Certainly, these structuring institutions and relations exist, but they don’t cover all aspects of people’s lives and this is precisely the space of manoeuvre and indeterminacy’. Again, this case indicates that that would be a misrepresentation of things. People themselves are also bound to these structuring forces and relations, ideologically, emotionally, or in other words, ethically. They are not the proverbial hustlers working the system, or even merely ‘rational’ actors who weigh calculable benefits and costs. Even though these are certainly aspects of parts of their lives, the choices, strategies are *limited* by ideological alignments with and ethical commitments to the ‘State’ or the leadership of the political party, as the case may be. In the final chapter I come back to this point, that is, the need to see people as moral agents (rather than smooth operators in the marketplace, a paradigm that is the logical culmination, if not the actual intention, of this kind of thinking about informality, foregrounding individuals and their desires).

For the moment, let me extend the review further back, to the introduction. The questions with which I started out this thesis followed from a more basic interest in how people imagine themselves part of the Lebanese political community. In particular I was curious how the sectarian system would figure into their imagination of who they are. How do people relate to the sectarian grid, as a way of classifying residents of Lebanon? Based on the preceding chapters, we can summarize an initial

answer as follows. Firstly, people in Khandaq consider themselves “of” the people. Secondly, at the same time, people consider themselves as part of the sectarian community. Thirdly, people also consider themselves part of the neighbourhood. The first and second are the two predominant ways people conceive of their ‘citizenship’, and they are at a tension, even if they are not mutually exclusive. Each frame becomes more or less relevant depending on the discursive context and the speaker’s objective. The third is a polyvalent (technically, ‘ambivalent’) membership. At times, the neighbourhood can stand for the “the people”; at others, it can stand for the confessional community (at least for the Shia majority of the neighbourhood). When the second and third are coupled, they emphasize their sectarian identity and frame themselves as defiant and agentive members of the political community, combative even (“the state doesn’t enter here!”). When the first and the third are coupled, they emphasize their relation to the state and frame themselves as marginalized members of the political community (“they don’t let us stand”). While they stress state neglect, such stress derives strength from a normative discourse about the *good* state, even if those norms tend to remain implicit.

This brings me to the second part of this conclusion, a look forward. What remains to be done in the final two chapters? Firstly, we move on to a contrasting case, to those people who consider themselves part of ‘civil society’. The value of the case is double. Ethnographically, we get a sense of the range of ways people can relate to ‘the sectarian system’. As will become clear, civil society activists and employees take quite different positions, enriching our understanding of (imaginaries of) ‘citizenship’ in Beirut. Theoretically, furthermore, the comparison of the cases invites reflection on conceptualizations of postcolonial citizenship by a variety of authors (Holston, Singerman, Chatterjee), who argue for or assume a duality of kinds of citizens (or logics of citizenship), which is divided along lines not entirely dissimilar to the differences between Khandaq and ‘civil society’. While in the following chapter I will show how ‘civil society’ is a moral and discursive universe indeed different from what we have seen so far, in the final chapter I show convergences and similarities that any neat dichotomy fails to capture. That chapter will also develop our sense of how the subject positions outlined in this chapter and the next may relate to people’s (broader, political) subjectivity.

## Chapter 5:

# Towards citizenship: reforming state and society

‘Yes to Dialogue’ (Na-am lil Hiwar) was an initiative by the NGO Towards Citizenship (Nahwa al-Muwatiniya) and consisted of (bi-) weekly discussion evenings about current and perennial topics preoccupying Lebanon and the challenges it faces. One evening in December 2009, the organizers held a meta-session about the question: “Civil Society and Power (*ṣulta*): Who Chooses Whom”? The occasion for the topic was the appointment of two previously important ‘members of civil society’ to high positions in government. Ziad Baroud, a lawyer who had been closely tied to the national campaign for electoral reforms, had become the head of the Ministry of Interior, whereas Ghassan Moukheiber, a lawyer and “activist” (his own words<sup>126</sup>) who often supported initiatives by NGOs for reform, had been re-elected to his post in Parliament. These successes begged the question for the organizers and others of how to understand the relations between civil society and state and government. Should those now be re-evaluated? The question implies a self-understanding of people ‘in’ civil society, according to which civil society is otherwise deprived of access to power. Now that they had ‘their’ men in government, though, what could they expect?

One person in particular spoke to the imagination: Ziad Baroud. He had been closely associated with LADE – the Lebanese Association for Democratic Reform – which had spearheaded the movement to hold local elections for the first time since 1972. When this push succeeded in 1998 (in spite of proposals by some political leaders to postpone them yet again) it was widely perceived in civil society as a great success and an example of the potential power of collective organization. Baroud still reflected the glow of that success and his image was therefore intimately entwined with the progressive promises of civil society. Hopes were

126 <http://www.ghassanmoukheiber.com/showArticles.aspx?aid=150> (accessed 2015-06-30)

accordingly high when he was appointed Minister of Interior. The statement by a member of the association Save Beirut Heritage, an initiative I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, might illustrate this.

I tend to think that the Interior Minister, and the Minister of Culture are playing a major role because they are aware. The Interior Minister – I’m not saying I think everything he does is perfect, but he has played a major role in facilitating the work of young associations, new NGOs. It’s a lot easier now than 4 years ago, to create an NGO. I mean legally. Because it’s the policy of the actual Minister. [...] They make things easier, they are encouraging youth initiatives. (Interview July 2010)

His persona correspondingly dominated the discussion at the Yes to Dialogue session (“hmm, every time we come back to Ziad Baroud” one of the speakers mused, when looking for an example to illustrate a point). Questions by the audience pertained to his role – can he still act as a member of civil society, now that he is a minister? And can he (and others like him) represent its interests at the heart of the state? Other questions were of a more general nature – does this mean that civil society ideology (is there and should there be such a thing?) now ‘has power’? The invited speakers, veteran members of civil society (Karam Karam, Gilbert Doumit, Adib Nehme), all defused such expectations somewhat. They emphasized that Baroud cannot but act as minister now, that is, as a representative of state, even if perhaps he can facilitate contact between activists and the policy making process; that civil society should not be “represented” in the state, but that its task is to demand that the state represent *all* of Lebanon; and that civil society has no ideology (like you would have if you were from the left, secular, or part of the opposition); it merely has to stay autonomous.

The assumptions that seemed to undergird questions of the audience and the contributions of the speakers became clearer to me as some of those audience members later explained to me that it was a running joke that Ziad Baroud was considered the *za'im* of Lebanon’s ‘19<sup>th</sup> sect’: civil society. That would explain, even if facetiously, a notion that ‘civil society’s interests’ should be represented in government by ‘its’ ministers, “just like other” sects. We thus see a perhaps curious Lebanese spin on what are arguably concerns that have preoccupied both normative theorists of civil society (revolving around a notion of a ‘society’ against a ‘state’) as well as those 1980s activists (paradigmatically, in communist Europe and authoritarian Latin-America) who first put the term on the agenda. (Cf. Walzer 2003: 306; Edwards & Foley 1998: 127) ‘Civil society’ is some kind

of space apart from the rest of society; and whereas civil society is the harbour for progressive forces in Lebanon, it is embattled by a stronger, conservative political apparatus.

To be clear, 'civil society' is an emic concept here. It is a label, deployed and self-ascribed by a large variety of organizations and – mostly highly-educated – individuals. As such it is an ideal that people strive to emulate (as individuals) or to realize (as a form of social and political organization), depending on which perspective they speak from. Accordingly, I shall use the term to gloss the ensemble of practices that aim at realizing that ideal. Such practices occur as much across public events as in the more 'private' (or at least back-stage) daily office settings of (non-governmental) organizations. I focus largely on the former in this chapter and more on the latter in Chapter 6. The import of public events derives from the fact that public spaces are paradigmatic and constitutive of the ideal of civil society itself, so we need to attend to them to understand what people think they are up to. What happens outside these public spaces – the material for Chapter 6 – complicates that self-understanding, and subsequently scholarly ideas about citizenship that are based on such self-understandings. Chapter 6 also discusses how the worlds of Khandaq and of civil society relate to each other, as well as how we should understand their disparities and convergences. This fifth chapter focuses on 'civil society' first, though.

**Scope and purpose of the chapter** Before going into the main body of the chapter, I need to provide two qualifications about what this chapter pertains to and what it set outs to accomplish. Firstly, in line with this chapter's focus of bringing out civil society's self-understanding, the material of this chapter is largely discursive. However, most of that material is situated ('public') speech, not discourse in written form. That makes this chapter primarily – if not exclusively – an exercise in something akin to what Hymes (1962) called an ethnography of speaking; in other words, it focuses on practices of speaking about politics, about social engagement and the state. Attention to other kinds of practices (e.g. of accomplishing one's stated goals), as well as some of the hopes and desires that go into them, follows in the next chapter.

A second qualification concerns the delimitation of 'civil society'. The field of civil society proper is already quite variegated, but that field is also enmeshed in a social scene and cultural field that cannot be reduced to it. Let me explain in order. First the field itself. It is made up by a generic type of advocacy work, such as coaxing the state to integrate youth as a concern into more policy domains; by NGO-based social work, such as

projects that promote the (psychological) well-being of children or women's integration into the economy; as well as by more activist activities – there are loose networks of like-minded activists, which may be activated and mobilized for topical protests, as well as small advocacy groups that are tied to a specific domain (like the environment, or heritage) and which attempt to sway public opinion and pressure politicians. While there are important similarities in ideology and the convergences in practices, what 'civil society' looks like and means to people will vary across these domains. It is therefore important to point out that the material here draws from the last category, and more particularly, those initiatives that want to reform Lebanese society by creating new public spaces and a new public culture.

The large social and cultural universe in which civil society is embedded pertains to the second question of delimitation. Civil society shares spaces and people with a young (and not so young), 'forward-looking professional class and (student) intelligentsia. The same people meet each other at, say, demonstrations for civil marriage; at a festival of the arts on the long ('patrimonial') stairs of the gentrified Gemmayze neighbourhood; at a documentary screening about the war of the Palestinian camps (1985-'89) at an NGO that deals with the legacy of the (civil) war; in the 'intellectuals' café T-Marbouta (library included) or other favourites of the Hamra neighbourhood; they may meet again in 'Zico's House', for a performance by one its foreign, resident artists or a meeting by one of the NGOs housed there. Then there are a myriad of incidental events, whether to promote an issue or to showcase – often socially relevant – artwork. Despite their differences, these events almost always explicitly or indirectly address larger questions of what defines Lebanon, what ails it, or what it could be. A loosely delineated group of people thus share political and 'aesthetic' concerns, through a certain consistency and coherence of ways of expressing them across these various spaces. The chapter cannot do justice to these interlinkages and cross-pollinations, but it is useful to keep in mind as it feeds into the particular moral and social universe that is 'civil society'.

**'Civil society' and the confessional system** Though most of the people active in the field of 'civil society' might well be naturally inclined to use, and think of themselves through, the Anglophone term, there are actually two translations of the term in Arabic. One – *al-mujtama' al-madani* – is more current than the second – *al-mujtama' al-ahli* – but they are both employed (in Lebanon and throughout the Arab world) and, to a certain extent, interchangeably. However, some civil society activists

do point to differences in meaning. Take Omar Traboulsi's response to the invitation to introduce the reader of the cross-cultural dialogue blog *Qantara* to 'civil society in Lebanon':

**Omar Traboulsi:** It is quite revealing that in the Arabic language, we have two terms to describe civil society, namely *al-mujtama al-ahli* and *al-mujtama al-madani*. The first term *ahli*, implies "kinship". It is also a broad term as it might also imply tribal rather than class or social movements which are more enshrined in the term *al-mujtama al-madani*. *Al-mujtama al-madani* carries a willingness to move away from traditional structures and perceptions. Civil society in Lebanon is more of an *ahli* rather than of a *madani* nature. Notwithstanding, both can function either against or in favor of the ruling party. There are also instances when they are in rivalry.

During and after the civil war of Lebanon, new trends have appeared. Environmental, human rights, women and certain secular organizations were formed that are more of a *madani* nature. Despite their importance, they still do not represent the dominant model.<sup>127</sup>

I suspect Traboulsi deems it "revealing" in the sense that only because the two sectors or social dynamics are so innately and significantly different, 'the Arabic language' could (had to) come up with two terms for something that for others is but one thing (the Eskimo snow phenomenon). While Traboulsi represents a somewhat nuanced stance on what separates the two ('ahli' can also align with progressive forces, even if incidentally), the general tendency for all who make a distinction is to associate *mujtama' madani* to a modern and progressive form of associational life, and *mujtama' ahli* to the conservative or even reactionary powers in the country. The etymology of the two terms easily play into this conception – *madani* comes from the root verb meaning to civilize or urbanize. *Ahli*, as Traboulsi explained, is at root a kinship term: *ahl* means family, kin or parents.

The distinction has various lives. In the 1990s, it became politically charged. In an interview, one of the founders of the gay advocacy group Helem, Jad, explained he disapproved of the distinction. Originally, he says, the distinction was coined to make a distinction between 'secular' organizations and 'religious' ones, i.e. those tied to established powers of the sectarian political system. But then it turned into a way of ostraciz-

127 <http://en.qantara.de/content/civil-society-in-lebanon-sensitive-political-issues-are-avoided>, interview by Bernhard Hillenkamp, 2005. Accessed 2013-09-15.

ing the latter kind of organizations, especially by the international donor community (when the NGO and donor were of different political persuasions). For example, USAID doesn't want to fund people working with Hizbullah and in order to justify such policies, they can base themselves on that distinction: 'they aren't *mujtama` madani*, so we can't fund them'. (Helem works with health providers tied to Hizbullah to deliver an education program to known cruising areas.) The people who invented the distinction, in other words, are simply "elitist". He identified them as part of the "new liberal movement" that sought to bring on a "revival" of Lebanese culture and society, a mirror to the Nahda ("Renaissance") in 19<sup>th</sup> century Beirut and Cairo. Jad saw it as a classist and racist enterprise, premised as it was on 'battling backwardness'<sup>128</sup>. He concluded rather gleefully though that the movement was over and its protagonists had become practically inconsequential since. (Interview May 2009)

While the old controversies may be over, the terminology survives. As Jad indicated, it can still be a powerful tool to make or break NGOs (e.g. to get or bar them from funding). Moreover, those discussions seem to reverberate in a next generation of civil society activists as well. Nayla, one of the directors of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, mentioned above, described the differences to me thus:

There's a lot of difference between them; I think that the *mujtama` al ahli* is more powerful than the *mujtama` al-madani* in Lebanon, and I think that, the more *mujtama` madani* is getting enforced [strengthened], [the more] *mujtama` ahli* could be weaker, because when we speak of *mujtama` ahli*, we speak of families, about confessions, that have a great impact on the voters, on citizens, on a lot of our life in Lebanon. So I think when the political parties are enforced, when civil society is enforced and the state itself is enforced, automatically, when the individual itself is considered more important than the family and the confession and other things. I think it's hard to work against the *mujtama` al-ahli* [laughs], we do not want to work against it, but we do not want this kind of community to enter, and to interfere in everything we're doing. (Interview May 2009)

"Ahli" here is therefore the whole associational field tied to the sects – its religious organizations, to some extent the political parties, as well as

128 Jad linked it to the immediate aftermath of the end of the civil war, when the militia intelligentsia changed careers to found NGOs and continued name-calling across old divides for a while.



the families that dominate the leadership of these communities. Upon a follow-up question she reiterated that even though they are not ‘against’ them, their respective goals are largely opposed, for instance in what concerns LADE’s central issue of electoral reform. ‘Ahli’ power *depends* on the current electoral system and the division of state and citizenry along confessional lines. Therefore LADE wants to work with those institutions that they consider to be (potentially) non-confessional, ‘civil’: they have worked with municipalities on electoral reform and helped political parties become more civil, less dependent on the big political families, for instance by offering to organize and monitor internal elections. It does so in the hope that these institutions will make state and politics function as they were designed to do.

Both the earlier history, as described by Jad, as well as more recent reverberations such as the one we in the above quote, are instructive about the self-imagination of much of the sector. *Al-mujtama’ al-ahli* figures as the kind of civil society ‘we’ don’t want – the civil society that is non-progressive, tied to the political establishment, to big (political) families, and to the sectarian political system of Lebanon more generally. The reverberations are generationally defined; younger respondents are unreflective or imprecise about the distinction<sup>129</sup> and certainly were not aware of something like the controversies Jad referred to. Yet the discursive battle is an indication of a broader ‘ethical’ and political tension – the larger stakes with which people invest their activism or social engagement – that exist independently of familiarity with this nomenclatorial history.

From this brief introduction we can already deduce that sectarianism is a central preoccupation. The chapter will flesh out in how far and in what ways it is so, but from these Lebanese interpretations of these two synonyms we can deduce that the opposition between what is truly civil (*madani*) and what is confessional (*ahli*) associational life defines people’s self-understanding. It may be useful (Sahlins 2002: 12) to marshal comparative ethnographic work here in order to transition into an analysis of how precisely people understand the difference between the two. Thus, Hansen (2013) talks about a similar distinction in India. He explains that in India religious ‘communalism’ has always been juxtaposed to ‘secularism’ in political life. Placing each distinction in their countries’ respective historical trajectories should help to bring focus to this chapter’s questions.

129 One younger member of the environmental organization Green Line vaguely associated *mujtama’ ahli* with ‘the population’, but was very clear that if you’re talking about ‘NGOs’, you’re talking about *madani*.

Hansen's article looks at the fundamental (though contested) norms undergirding public and political life in India. 'Secularism' turns out to play a central role here. Hansen argues that the value of secularism in India comes from mainly two sources. One is the (British) idea of the cultured and reasoned (reasonable) intellectual or man of public affairs, whereas the second is the trauma of Separation, which underscored the value and necessity of religious 'tolerance'. A number of oppositions follow from this. One is that between 'politics' and 'culture' or religion. One's religious community is the domain of culture, valuable in itself, but one that should not be mixed with politics. Politicians should therefore *transcend* religious ('cultural') affairs and concerns. This entails a differentiation of proper and improper public conduct. Proper, 'secular', conduct consists of cool speech and demeanour, shows tolerance and accommodation and derives from a sense of 'responsibility'. The other of this secular public self takes the passions of religious life and membership (perfectly legitimate in their own domain) into the public domain, uses incendiary language, thus renouncing its sense of responsibility. These distinctions are related to a final (more implicit) opposition, which is one of class or status: the secular public self is one thought to be tied to education and its derivative middle class cultural capital, whereas the communal self would be one inhabited (so the well-educated modern individual believes) by the poorer masses.

Lebanon historically shares the concern with religious differences as the core question of the nation. The 'solution', cumulatively elaborated under Ottoman and French rule, and subsequently Independence, has been of a slightly different nature from that in India. The progressive institutionalization of (proportional) religious representation has led not to a state that is conceived of as 'above' the religious communities (see Hansen 2013: 215), but to a state that itself has become communitarian (i.e., sectarian). That means that "secularism" has also acquired a very different meaning in the Lebanese context. To be "secular" is to believe the state should not have religious adherence as the basis for its mode of operation. To be secular is to envision a (radically) different way of imagining co-existence of the sects, rather than, as in India, to subscribe to the traditional (colonial) role of the state. This kind of secularism is important in civil society. Many expect that a reduction or abolishment of sectarianism as a principle of administration will reduce corruption and counter communalist tendencies in society. Given that this political ideal is therefore situated in a different historical and semantic context, we should ask what 'secularism' and 'sectarianism' mean precisely in Lebanon. What kind of currency does it have in Lebanon? What are other oppositions that make up its

semantic complex? For instance, how do people see politics and how do they relate it to the 'cultural' domain? What are the ideals of public conduct and performance?

The answers to this question will be fleshed out along the chapter. One element to emphasize from the start though is one other convergence with India, which is the disdain for ('dirty') politics. As politics lost its paradisiacal even-handedness after the religious passions of the masses were hurled onto the public scene, so India's middle class folks' "impatience with the messy realities of politics" (Yanav in Hansen 2013: 224) increased. The disdain for the political is quite prominent in Lebanese civil society as well. Again, the historical and semantic context is different: there is no traditional role that politicians can fall back on, or be called to inhabit, in the eyes of civil society activists. Since the state and government were never elevated above the confessional fray, politicians are seen as inherently problematic (guilty until proven innocent) as players in a corrupted system.<sup>130</sup> Subsequently, much of this chapter is about how people who want change for Lebanon try to accomplish such change without getting dragged down into the mud of messy and dirty politics. This also has consequences for what civil society 'is' for people: it is an alternative space, mostly for young and highly educated people, where they can rehearse their dream for a 'civil' society, imagine and experience what it might look like – away from other domains of their lives, dominated by sectarian realities.

While we will slowly move towards the next chapter, in which we will see how people in civil society try to address the state, this chapter discusses how in fact many organizations focus their energies on sectarian *society*. In sequence then, I discuss Yes to Dialogue in order to show the idea of the social as the proper domain of intervention, as against 'politics'; to UMAM as an example of an organization that seeks to effect change in society and politics through culture; and finally, a heritage project in the neighbourhood Zoqaq al-Blat, as an example of how one might address "ahli" society directly, as well as of what putting pressure on the state in a civil way looks like. That then provides the natural bridge to the next chapter.

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130 Two recurrent exceptions stood out: President Chehab was the idealized modernizer from the past (late '60s), curbing the power of traditional leaders and improving the quality of the bureaucracy (notably by introduction merit-based selection), whereas Minister of Interior Baroud was the recipient of much pent-up, and ultimately frustrated hope, as well as appreciation for the things he was trying to accomplish. These figures populate fantasies of "stern bureaucrats acting as impartial voices of reason and fair play from the commanding heights of the central government" (Hansen 2013: 224), except that no one in Lebanon believes that the "central government" stands on any sort of commanding height. The 'absent state' is too strong a counter-trope.

**‘Yes to Dialogue’: politics and civility in a plural public** As mentioned, Yes to Dialogue was a program run by the organization Toward Citizenship. The organization consisted of “citizens” whose main focus is on educating and training young people to be better, i.e. more informed and engaged citizens themselves.<sup>131</sup> They do so in a number of different programs, some of which run continuously – like Yes to Dialogue or the so-called Parliamentary Monitor – others are intermittent, like the youth training program *baddi koun mas’oul* (“I want to be leader”), which allows high school or college students to learn about how the political system works. The programs can also be categorized according to their purpose. Yes to Dialogue is a “dialogue” program; the Parliamentary Monitor, which keeps track policy promises of certain MPs and invites them to explain their track record, represents their “advocacy” effort; whereas *baddi koun mas’oul* focuses on “awareness”.<sup>132</sup> As to ‘Yes to Dialogue’, the title is purposefully chosen: the term ‘dialogue’ is one strongly associated with high-level politics, where it functions as an incantation used to smooth over conflict, for instance when political actors from different ‘camps’ come to the “table of (national) dialogue”. Yes to Dialogue, however, wanted to claim dialogue for individual citizens. As the quote below suggests, society itself is in need of dialogue. The quote is expressive of the thesis of the territorialization of the Lebanese mind (cf. Chapter 1): the belief that the problem of Lebanon today is one of distance and misunderstanding between people who live in different social and geographical spaces, often at opposing political ends. It also expresses a hope that, should the culture of society change, people would exert pressure on politicians to conform to this new culture:

The absence of dialogue in the Lebanese arena is an existential dilemma; indeed, it is essential for multicultural societies – should they elect to remain as such – to discuss and eventually agree on a common set of values and a vision for the state and the future.

To ignite dialogue at the grassroots level, and create an open space hoping that authentic interchange would one day lead to a genuine dialogue among the political class, Na-aM lil Hiwar [‘Yes to Dialogue’] was launched in Beirut in February 2006. Na-aM lil Hiwar is a weekly

131 See <http://daleel-madani.org/profile/nahwa-al-muwatiniya> (accessed 2015-06-30)

132 There are other programs still. See <http://na-am.org/a/>. The Parliamentary Monitor, meanwhile, is also about educating MPs about what it means to be representative to citizens, when they are asked to explain their choices in parliament, and asked to do so on the basis of a *policy programme* (a recurrent complaint about (the more influential) politicians one can hear in civil society is that they vie for loyalty only on a personal basis, not on the basis of a political programme).

dialogue in an informal setting, where youth come to listen to a guest speaker and join in a debate and discussion afterwards.<sup>133</sup>

The purpose was thus to acquaint people with what it means to engage in a discussion with people you don't know, who may come from other 'strands of society' (i.e. sect), and whom you disagree with. Each week (later every two weeks), the program organized a debate around a particular, current topic. Sessions have included such topics as the value added tax, shooting incidents in one of Beirut's southern suburbs, a special (tourist and educational) project to reconstruct and sail a Phoenician boat, election specials as well as debates with electoral candidates. One or two speakers would start off by stating their opinions, after which a Q&A would follow, which sometimes evolved into sustained interaction between attendees. All of this was streamlined by a moderator, who would draw attention to or enforce norms of civil debate. For example, upon introducing a special review session of the general elections in 2009, with Ziad Baroud as acting Prime Minister and Gilbert Doumit as the coordinator of the election observations, the moderator spelled out the "conditions" of the debate, like stating your name, following order, asking questions instead of making statements, being succinct, but also not straying from the topic at hand, which was the *process* of the election, not the actual election itself. So if people could please cast their partisan colours for the night.

Staying away from politics is an important norm and it shows us something essential about (Lebanese) civil society. In the following I'll show what this norm is about, by going through an example of how one can properly talk about sensitive issues, without getting 'political'. The example consists of a special session on "The Civil War According to 3 Different Generations" (April 2010, see picture on following page). The session was meant as a kind of revitalization of the Yes to Dialogue programme ("it's not just a hiwar, it's an event..."), which had suffered from declining audience numbers for some time. To start off with a topic that was surely to speak to the imagination, the new organizer wanted to put the programme back on the (civil) map. The questions that framed the discussion were formulated from the perspective of the youth, as the moderator explained.

"Just to remind you, we haven't come here today to know what were the causes, who killed whom or whatever. We are a new generation, perhaps there are people present from a previous generation as well,

but [most of us] were born in the 80s and 90s, we haven't lived the war as much. We wouldn't like, maybe, to go into the details [*na`rif hal 'umūr al-day'a*], as much as we would like to know our past, so that we can plan for our *future*, and this is the basis upon which we will dialogue today."

The speakers were then introduced – the representative of the 'old' generation, who really lived through the war, the president of the Former Lebanese Political Detainees in Syria; a consultant who was invited to talk about his personal experiences as a schoolboy during the war; and finally an 'expert', a social scientist, born in the 1980s who was asked to give a more impartial "conclusion" to the debate (incidentally, the expert in question was an UMAM employee). After their short talks, the moderator from Nahwa al-Muwatiniya opened the floor for questions. After suggesting the kinds of questions one might ask each participants, he reiterated the theme of his earlier introduction as the fundamental line of questioning:

"We as youth today, to what extent are we ready, maybe... so the circumstances just got a bit more complicated, but to what extent are we ready to go forward? To what extent should we look back, while we're going forward? Cause we don't want to, to look back. But how much do we need [*lāzim*] to look back in order to move [forward]? Do we need [*bi-ḥāja*] to know our past, to go forward? Do we need to know what happened? Do we need to take on more expertise to know how to face our future, to create the social harmony that Mr. Sevag talked about earlier? I don't know, let's start the dialogue together, if someone wants to start, please".

The moderator appears to already place some safeguards against the discussion going in the wrong direction. We'll see that he will attempt to keep these safeguards in place during the debate.

I'll start out with an example of the normative way of debating ('political') issues in public. Let's turn to the opening question from the public after our moderator's invitation. The speaker introduced his question by invoking the recurrence of violence in Lebanon. "The problem of Lebanon is but one, a small problem. There are sects that do not trust each other". One has weapons, the other is afraid". While the phrasing is generic – "there are sects" - it is clear to all those present that he is talking about Hizbullah (who has weapons), and about the Christians (who are afraid). The speaker, after specifying that fear, went on to present the

following recommendation. I will quote it at length to give some context, but the crux in the quote lies in him shying away from becoming specific.

So there's but one thing to learn from the past. That we have to let people trust each other [*nkhalli al-nās tūsa bi-ba'd*], to get the one who's carrying weapons, for whatever reasons, I don't want get into names [*fūt bi-'asmā'*], to give the opportunity to settle, to one of these days tell us, ok, I fulfilled what's important to me, come and let's work together for the country.<sup>134</sup>

The qualifier “I don't want to get into names” is the literal expression of a discursive rule to not get specific, a rule that tends to make for a somewhat peculiar, generic form of discussion and one that holds for many discussions I've heard at such events. People do not address (political) issues head-on, instead they side-step it through some generic formulation, even if presumably everyone is quite capable of reading between the lines and assume which names go in the blanks.

The rule isn't absolute and with a topic such as the civil war it is easy to transgress it. However, as I show in the example below, the rule is policed. One presumes out of fear of a derailment of the discussion into heated name-calling, or perhaps because a deep-seated conviction of what civil society is for – to foster and cater to a different kind of “activist” consciousness which cannot get bogged down by “politics” (in the Lebanese sense of the word). In the example below, we can see that getting into names triggers an intervention by the moderator.

A young woman who identified herself as being from a village in the Shouf mountain addressed the difference between forgiveness and forgetting. Forgiveness has been one of the themes addressed by the second panel speaker: what to forgive and when to forget? It's an important question to her, because, as she said, “there are *consequences* [English in original] till this day”. The consequences she seemed to hint at is that of continuing to show allegiance to those who plunged the country into an interminable war. She segues into an example – the (virtually uncontested) leader of the Druze and head of the Progressive Socialist Party (cf. Chapter 1), Walid Jumblatt.

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134 He later actually does mention names, explicitly framing it as such as well, as if careful to acknowledge his infraction of proper public discursive etiquette. “If that would happen, if it were possible – I'm going to mention names of political leaders now – if Samir Geagea goes to Haret Hreik to give a speech, and Nasrallah goes to Achrafieh to give a speech, the situation may be defused. If only these two people would go to each other's regions, the reasons for war would dwindle”. Also note the territorial imagination of the political process here.

Poster for the "Civil War According to Three Generations" debate organized by Yes to Dialogue.



*Druze girl:* Walid Jumblatt, that I unfortunately once followed, said in every one of his speeches "I decided to forget, but I didn't forget. And I didn't forgive". And then he says how at his palace [*qaṣr*] he dialogues and sits at the same table with those who killed his father. I would like to turn to Jumblatt and ask him, as a Druze, how could he sell out his father ["his father's blood"]? He who sells out his father, couldn't he also sell out his people? He says he protects the sect and our honour. But our honour is also Lebanon's honour. And Lebanon's honour [lies] in all of Lebanon. Kamal Jumblatt was a great leader (*za'im*) but not a politician. Those who read Kamal Jumblatt's history you will know that he was not...

*Moderator:* [cuts her off] I'm sorry we don't really want to get into politics

*She:* No, ok

*Moderator:* we are talking 'socially'

*She:* My point [*naḡari*] is social, the issue is we are electing him again. We are electing him again since 2000.

5

She seems to have convinced the moderator for the moment that indeed she was not getting 'political' and was merely using a political example to talk about the errors of the ways of the people of Lebanon, i.e., to stick



with their leaders – arguably a social problem. At least she was allowed to carry on for a while without further interruption (although it takes a while for murmuring in the room to quiet down again). At a certain point however, she’s cut off again. After having explained that Lebanese youth are taught from early on to categorize and evaluate each other on the basis of sectarian identity, the cruelty of which she had to learn when she came to Lebanon in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, she conveyed her most important lesson: that the Lebanese “need to appreciate each other as human beings [*bashar*]”, rather than as members of religious communities. She went on:

I respect Samir Geagea<sup>135</sup> for that, I imagine he’s the only human being [*insān*] among politicians who paid for what he did. General Aoun, he has reformist ideas, but...

Moderator: we don’t want to talk about politicians, the dialogue is about social things.

She: these *are* social issues. [overlapping statements] OK, I hope – I don’t have right to vote yet and I hope that every one of you, I imagine you’re older than me and can vote. I hope that when you cast your vote you look back and remember all those who died, for instance, in your case [to one of the speakers], your father died, you have to remember all those who died and suffered, that you keep in mind (*hoṭṭ iddām ‘ayūnak*) those who are either in prisons or [died in] explosions. [inaudible] I hope that when you go to vote that you think of them, we’re repeating our history again and bringing the curse on ourselves (*minjīb al balā’ la halna*). Thank you.

As soon as she mentioned names again, the moderator intervened to redirect the discussion to proper topics.

In order to show how particular this way of talking is, I’m going to briefly leap back to Khandaq with a contrasting example of ‘political talk’. The contrast makes clear there is something peculiar about ‘civil dreams’, or more precisely, what ‘civil society’ (as a discursive practice) allows people to publicly dream about and how. Early 2011, Abu Zalem invited the head of one of the secular, left-wing parties, Najah Wakim, to speak about his recent trip to Syria. After he gave his talk, answered a few questions

135 Samir Geagea, head of the Christian militia-then-party The Lebanese Forces. When the girl mentions he paid for what he did, she refers to the fact that he was imprisoned on charges of bombing a church and released after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. The bombing took place after the war though, so technically he did not ‘pay for what he did during the civil war’, just like every political leader whose power goes back to that time, courtesy of the general amnesty law.

and left, Abu Zalem, some members of his loyal clique and a few visitors from a neighbourhood across town, retreat into Abu Zalem's office and rehearse what they have heard. At a certain point, Abu Zalem goes off on a tangent about one of his pet-peeves: the decline of pan-Arab currents in the region.

AZ: Get that into your head, that Marxist philosophy, and the communist idea, and and and... started a revolution! But today, if you want the right thinking (*fikr saḥīḥ*) to enter people [s minds], people bury it. Today, what's accepted [thinking]? Sectarian thinking [*fikr al-mazhab wal-ṭā'ife*] Today, a shaykh or a professor who costs a hundred million dollars, nobody will take notice, but a shaykh who costs a handful of tea and bag of cookies, and speaks slander... Take Ahmad Assir<sup>136</sup>, go figure how many people he amasses. Then take Muhsen Ibrahim. The engineer of the National Movement<sup>137</sup> and the PLO. If President Hafez al-Assad, what did he say? 'If I got stuck in a pickle, and I'd see no solution, I would call Muhsen Ibrahim and he'd solve it'. Yasser Arafat says he's the engineer of the Palestinian Resistance. And where's he now, Muhsen Ibrahim?

Visitor: he is isolated [*mitqawqa` ala bāb bi-bayto*]

AZ: Sitting at home. And Ahmad Assir? He became a za'im. Shahhal<sup>138</sup> – za'im. Adnan Traboulsi<sup>139</sup> – za'im. We don't want to mention any other names to not upset those with whom we stand. All who come on television [are replacing] those who can talk. They've all become political bosses! And people listen to them, calling it great news while they're eating shit<sup>140</sup>! Worthless speeches [*ḥaki ma bya`rfu yihku*]. There's no place for you anymore, man! Well, there is a place – commit to sectarian speak and people will get so scared that the hair on their body will stand up. They will say 'the Sunna will kill us so watch out!', and 'the Shia want to kill us so watch out!'...

As you can see, 'getting into names' is an integral aspect of this kind of public speaking and reasoning. Political characters are exemplars of things good and bad in Lebanon, or cases through which to explore the good and bad. At the end of the chapter I go into reasons where this con-

136 A Salafi cleric and leader of recent prominence and of particular concern to these men.

137 Left-wing coalition in first years of civil war.

138 Salafi cleric from Tripoli, north of Lebanon.

139 Ex-MP for the Ahabash (strict Sufi Sunni movement), close to Hizbullah. See following sentence.

140 Is also a colloquialism for 'fucking/getting fucked'.

trast with 'civil' talk might come from. For now I stick with the observation that 'politics' is a concern (in the sense that 'specifics' are) for people in civil society, and explore how one might cope with the injunction against it, while still attempting to achieve social or political change. I do so by examining an NGO dedicated to publicly processing the memories of the (civil) war.

**'UMAM': "Non-politics as golden cover for political action"** The directors of the following NGO also recognize and make the distinction between the social and the political, just like the moderators of Yes to Dialogue did. However, these directors are meta-reflexively purposeful in making the distinction. Ideally their NGO would in fact work in the opposite manner from Yes to Dialogue, because UMAM, or 'UMAM Documentation & Research' as its full name runs, attempts to open up a ('social' or 'cultural') space where people can actually 'get into specifics'. If my reading above about the taboo of such a discursive practice during civil society events is correct, that would not be an easy thing to do. Below therefore, I show some of the challenges it faces in doing so.

The organization was founded by former publicist Lokman Slim and his German partner, Monika Borgmann, and it seeks to address what it perceives as one of the foundational problems of Lebanese society – that the war has never been dealt with in a public way, that its memory remains suppressed, and that antipathies still linger underneath the surface. This is in fact a widely shared diagnosis, according to which the sectarian enmities that have come out of the war constitute in fact the main stumbling block for Lebanon's future. UMAM has developed its own approach to this issue through a quasi-academic format. The organization started out by building an archive – interviewing actors and collecting documents of the war – but it quite quickly branched out into the organization of events that would hopefully provoke and organize some form of public deliberation. Thus, its first official public action as an organization was the screening of a documentary film about the origins of the civil war (for which Jocelyn Saab, a well-known Lebanese film maker, interviewed contemporaneous actors).<sup>141</sup>

141 The first event they organized officially as UMAM is paradigmatic in that sense. The poster they designed for Saab's screening ('Le Liban dans la Tourmente', in French, with Arabic fragments, without subtitles) showed all the "heroes" from the war – that is, all those political leaders and figures from that time who are still 'leading' Lebanon now. It acts as a visual expression of a past that lives on and also reveals the desire to be confrontational, provocative (by visually identifying political actors).

While the archive hadn't opened to the public at the time of research<sup>142</sup>, UMAM did 'diffuse' some of the information gathered in the archive in exhibitions or one-night discussion events. The type of events they held included film screenings, art exhibitions (installations or visual art, sometimes travelling exhibits, sometimes curated by UMAM), and publication events. Thus, they had held recurrent 'Missing' exhibitions, about the thousands of people reported missing during the civil war; screened documentaries it had co-produced such as interviews with former fighters; or external fiction and documentary film screenings. These latter documentaries are often about other cases of civil war (the Balkan, Iraq), undoubtedly in the hope of sparking new perspectives and reflections on what Lebanon has gone through. Ultimately, the goal of such events was to create an "informed citizenship" (interview employee UMAM, March 2010): by organizing the lectures and debates, by opening up the archives, the institution would facilitate a culture of dialogue and openness.

As an explication of what it drives at with such a culture, we can take the screening of another movie about the civil war, called "Chou Sar" ('What Happened?'). A 2009 documentary by DeGaulle Eid, it documents the search by the film maker to uncover and indict the people who were behind the 1980 murder of his parents, sister and eleven other family members. The film was banned in Lebanon. Eid explains why in the following interview<sup>143</sup>:

Some will tell you, as the General Security did, 'why did you name names'? The reason for the ban is that I name names. Well, who gave him the right to say, 'well since you name names or political parties you have to cut our parts of the film'?

The 'right' for this kind of censorship was a ruling tied to the policy of general amnesty for all participants in the 1975-1990 wars. In the interest of 'closing the files', the General Security's censorship department was given the legal authority to hush public discussions about what happened during those years. Such legislature is of course at the heart of what UMAM identifies as what is wrong with Lebanon today. Perhaps

142 In order to be opened to the public, the archive still needed an effective catalogue for it to be searchable, but they were also wary of actual political intervention. There would be some juridical space (see below) for politicians to confiscate material implicating certain persons on the grounds that it would be incendiary and threaten the safety of those individuals. UMAM itself also wasn't sure how people would react. (Informal interview with anonymous UMAM employee, March 2010)

143 In a fragment that was taken up in a YouTube presentation of the film at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fN3k\\_Mz10xA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fN3k_Mz10xA). (accessed 29-06-2015)

unsurprisingly therefore, the documentary was screened for the first time by UMAM in 2012, after some public pressure caused PM Ziad Baroud to “personally intervene” and create a special decree that would allow the film to be screened in “academic contexts”. UMAM’s legitimization of showing the film (despite or perhaps because of its censorship):

*Chou Sar?* is simply a *film*. However, as evidenced by the debate it caused, it is one powerful enough to disclose the depth of the inter-Lebanese disagreement over what is to be done about our past, the extent to which it haunts our present, and how likely it is to inflame simmering tensions. From that perspective, an act of censorship based on a prediction that the cultural or intellectual work in question may provoke latent tensions or endanger “civil peace” should be considered a normal response—albeit one implemented by elements of the same political establishment that has failed to place this country on the path toward real, lasting pacification. Therefore, demonstrating passively our opposition to censorship, such as by watching a film like *Chou Sar?*, represents the most elemental method available to express public disapproval with the enduring philosophy of sweeping our dust under the rug.<sup>144</sup>

As you can see, it is precisely the taboo of being specific in public (self-censorship) that animates UMAM’s endeavours. But how open can this self-liberating culture be? Some of these events do not relate directly to Lebanese experiences, and these are perhaps the most ‘academic’ events: they tend to provoke reflection of a more general sort of nature (and thus would not necessarily promote ‘specific’ discussions). Yet, others follow directly out of the Lebanese context and therefore speak directly so certain people’s interests. In these later cases, the desire to speak openly, or to educate people about the past, would clash with the general injunction to never go into the specifics of such topics (publically). How does UMAM deal with that contradiction? How would UMAM try to circumvent or neutralize these taboos?

Slim has his own way of thinking about this. Consider his response to my question after UMAM’s ‘founding moment’. At the beginning of his answer, he pointed out that he didn’t think there was really one founding moment. Instead he traced the beginnings of UMAM back to a growing consciousness of different techniques of “tackling issued related to the *res publica*”. His training in a leftist party/militia during the war years

144 <http://umam-dr.org/template.php?id=7>, (accessed 2013-09-22).

had endowed him with a sense of the value of education – which had been a fundamental component of military training and a *sine qua non* for advancement within the party – and thus the value of words as transformational force.

if have to trace this interest in intervention [in] different ways, like words, other words, printed words, then pictures, footages, cinema, then perhaps it's coming from this belief that politics is a kind of a short-lived intervention, especially in a country like Lebanon, when, if you're not the son of, if you're not backed by a *za'im*, if you want to keep a certain independence, the so-called 'non-political' activism is kind of golden cover of any political action, because it's much more sustainable, it can survive, whereas you would have to make concessions regarding your political stance. You can continue to be more radical, intellectually, whereas you'd be required for political reasons to be less radical.

Then in the post-war period, he learned that sometimes political topics and issues can best be dealt with indirectly anyway – say through 'cultural' events. That way, you deflect the discussion away from those it intends, which may be necessary, for those people might intervene and shut down the discussion (and possibly those discussing). At least, this is something he witnessed when the country was still under Syrian tutelage (or "occupation" as Slim insists).<sup>145</sup> While organizing 'cultural' events though, you can still propagate new ideas, seed the right questions and foster critical attitudes. In other words, the balancing act is all about being 'non-political' while potentially and surreptitiously engaging in 'political talk' all the same. (Note that in addition to the reason for avoiding specifics that was cited in relation to Chou Sar – namely, the fear it might quicken latent tensions - Slim thus mentions another rationale, namely that people with vested interests do not want you talking about those things.) How do these techniques work out in practice? As a case-study, I'll take the screening of an oral history documentary that UMAM had been commissioned to make about the neighbourhood of Zoqaq al-Blat. The documentary, "Migration Alley", elicits people's memories of the various waves of migration into the neighbourhood since roughly the 1940s. In doing so, it invites their reflections about the changing built environment

145 Part of the Taif agreements that formed the basis for the official 1990 cease-fire was that Syria would have far-reaching prerogatives and (military) presence in Lebanon, officially in order to help prevent it from sliding back into violence.

as well. The general narrative of the documentary is that of a transformation of a 'bourgeois' neighbourhood into a popular area. It was commissioned for an urban heritage project called 'From the Alphabet to the Renaissance', a project I describe in greater detail in the following section. The screening of the Zoqaq al-Blat documentary drew an almost full house: the UMAM "hangar", a converted factory space situated in the northern section of the southern suburbs, hosted about 200 people (of a total capacity of approximately 300). After the screening, one of the consultant-employees of UMAM, Marie-Claud Soueid, took the mic and introduced various people involved with the heritage project, and in particular Marie-Claude Bitar, the events coordinator of the project, and Karim Hakim, co-director of the film, for the Q&A. UMAM Q&As are seldom successful in retaining people's attention, which may be due in part to the fact that it does not have a clear idea about who its audience is. This shows in quite basic operational matters, such as language choice. This evening also was plagued with Babylonian confusions, with Hakim speaking in English and translating himself into Arabic; with Bitar speaking in French, because she did not feel comfortable holding forth in Arabic; and Soueid somewhat clumsily translating Bitar into a mix of modern standard Arabic and colloquial (Lebanese) Arabic, a mix that was undoubtedly an expression of some of her own discomfort with public oratory in Arabic. The translations were a gesture to the expat contingent among the audience, though Soueid had hoped (as she confessed to me later) that the public would be the French educated Beirut bourgeoisie<sup>146</sup>. It wasn't. Not entirely at least.

The diversity of the audience and the difficulty UMAM had in adapting to that diversity reverberated in the discussion that followed. In general, the discussion failed to establish a common definition of the situation. In particular, there were two competing lines of interpretation of what the film was about: one was whether it was about sectarianism and communitarian co-existence or about social class (and class co-existence). The second, which ran through and parallel to the first, was whether it was about 'heritage' or about the everyday experience of the neighbourhood. Perhaps the most significant dynamic for our purposes here is the tension between sectarianism and social class. Several people from the audience picked up on the element of the breakdown of communitarian co-existence over the years, with the various political crises, street altercations and outright war. However, this was an element that was downplayed in

146 At a certain point she – hopefully – asked the audience if sticking to French wouldn't be good enough.

the documentary, which, as Hakim explained, was primarily about the contrast of old wealth and the contemporary lower-class population:

The movie started with a simple observation, when you go to Zoqaq al-Blat, one of the first things that struck [me] is, these big, old British houses and the category of people living there, it's a bit contradictory, like bourgeois houses with a very popular class of people. So the first question I wanted to answer, how come? And the best way to answer was to go back in history, from the start of Zoqaq al-Blat, to how it became what it is today. That was mainly the idea that motivated the movie.

Bitar, meanwhile, wanted to emphasize culture, heritage, and history, over and against questions of sect and class. When Soueid invited her on stage to introduce the larger project (of which the film was a part), it became clear that her imagined audience (much like Soueid's) consisted of neighbourhood outsiders, not the residents who were likely present as well.

From there, we organised, we set up a project with St. Joseph University and UMAM and the idea was in fact to draw attention – to firstly turn Zoqaq al-Blat into a pilot project – and to draw attention to the history of all of Beirut's neighbourhoods, so that everyone in fact, rediscovers his history and to reconnect to history, his own history and the history of his quarter and, in the end, the history of his country. You can actually see that quite well in the film that Karim just showed – I'll tell you right away, it's by the way the first time I see it, so it's with a really new look, let's say. [Soueid's translation in Arabic] But Zoqaq al-Blat lives again, because the neighbourhoods have changed with the war, that's normal. But there is a heritage of the past that we need to go back to, because it is our treasure [*richesse*] and if we want to go towards the future, I think the best way would be to start by knowing one's past.

She does want to talk about 'sect' in one sense, but only in its positive dimension – namely, what you might call the heritage of co-existence (and other cosmopolitan accomplishments<sup>147</sup>) – the ultimate value of that heritage, also in its physical manifestations.

147 'One aspect of the project that that hasn't been talked about in the film, but one which is very rich [*dense*], is the cultural aspect of Zoqaq al-Blat. Zoqaq al-Blat has a great many schools, that have hosted the most prestigious teachers of the Arab world, who have created the Arab Nahda, and the Lebanese need to know this, that it was these among others who created a new dynamic for (*redynamisé*) the Arabic language, so it was important that this history, which belongs to all, would again be brought to light through this project'.



Yet at several reprises, questions from the audience steered the conversation back to sectarian communities. One man points to the ‘fact’ that the bourgeoisie that settled in the area was largely a Christian bourgeoisie.

For sure, if this film talks about the issue in an anthropological manner, or sociologically, the question is how did this neighbourhood change from one where most people were Christian to one where the majority is Muslim? And that Islamic majority means there’s now only a reduced diversity. Of course, it isn’t easy to treat this [topic] in an artistic way, but how should we understand it, this issue in the wounded memory of Beirut?

Hakim countered that in fact the bourgeoisie was Muslim as well, and that focusing on this aspect wouldn’t teach you as much about the neighbourhood anyway. That is not what you wonder about when you first enter the area: “it’s the contradiction between the social classes that strikes the eye”. The next question wondered about the differences between different denominations on the Sunni side. Hakim answered that in his conversations these differences did not come up in any substantial way. There was no “discourse” about these kinds of oppositions. There were remarks about the events of 2008, but generally sectarian relations wasn’t something people talked about. When there was a follow-up remark that things look different in the neighbouring area Mousseitbe, to which Hakim quipped that that’ll be the sequel, Soueid intervened and steered the topic away from the issue of the relationship between the sects. Instead, she said, we want the discussion focus more on “history”, not on the “results”. Again, then, just as things were getting specific – that is, just as people started talking about identifiable constituents of the Lebanese polity (sects) – the moderator drew the line of what may be properly discussed. Even in the context of an organization that hopes to break through (or at least expand) the limits of proper discussion, it proves difficult to skirt the limits into the domain of the political (sectarian relations). Instead the moderator opted to stay within the domain of the social and/or cultural (history).

There is clearly a desire then to be radical in a critique of Lebanese social norms (regarding the war) and politics (certainly by the directors). Secular commitments are evident in the mistrust of established political interests, intimately tied to the sectarian system and its hush-up compromise after the war. However, there are factors that mitigate that desire. One factor – one I haven’t drawn attention to thus far – is that an organization like UMAM is part of the NGO world, dependent on funding, especially from

outside Lebanon<sup>148</sup>, which cannot but direct projects in a more quietist direction (as the sustainability of the donor's presence in the country is at stake). That would favour a more academic format. The kind of public it therefore attracted and catered to was less capable of intervening decisively in the public sphere, the kind of intervention Slim so desperately wanted, because it would have come interested in a more general reflection and more general changes (in contrast to a public that had personal stakes in the matter). A second factor are the norms of public discourse in Lebanon. Slim was clearly aware of these norms (and he explains their existence in light of the political climate and its policy of general amnesty and amnesia), and so he recognized the limits of a provocative style. This is why he works through the cultural and social domain, why UMAM works through films and like events. It is with the aim of changing citizenry – for which it deploys its own term: “informed citizenry” – in the hope that such citizenry would ultimately change the political landscape. However, that does put the organization in something of a catch 22. On the one hand, its ambition is to transform public space, but the way it has to operate makes it difficult to tap into a (potential) segment of their audience, the people who come there to really say something about their own experiences – not to ‘be informed’.

### **‘Zoqaq Reborn’: Recapturing the spirit of a golden age of co-existence**

The main example I discuss in this chapter is a project that grew out of a EU-funded comparative study of ‘urban regeneration’ of historical areas in Mediterranean port cities (Istanbul, Beirut, Oran and El Mina), called Archimedes. MAJAL, the ‘urban observatory’ of Balamand University’s Academy of Fine Arts, was contracted to execute the study for Beirut. After the mandate finished and the money ran out, the people at MAJAL had been enthused about what actually seemed possible for the regeneration of Beirut’s historical areas, and had become conscious of the urgency of the task, given the current speed of their demise. Because they were unable the municipal authorities committed, they decided to launch a pilot-project to draw attention to the issue and to exert pressure on local government. They focussed their efforts on the area of Zoqaq al-Blat, a neighbourhood that is part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century belt around the old, essentially medieval city of Beirut (which is more or less the current Downtown area). They chose Zoqaq al-Blat for two reasons. They considered the neighbourhood to have an exemplary historical role in national

148 In the case of UMAM that includes the USAID (controversial in civil society and broadly seen as rather conservative).

identity and culture and it still possessed a significant number of buildings that dated from that history. Now, hopefully, it would also play an exemplary role in how patrimonial Beirut might yet be protected, across the city's historical neighbourhoods.

More concretely, the idea for the project – 'From the Alphabet to the Renaissance' (see pictures on page 194) – was to invite people from across Beirut to get up close and personal with the area's history and remaining 'landmarks' and to interest the municipality in taking the action it could in preserving them. According to the official launching statement, its objective is "the urban renovation of Zoqaq al-Blat through culture", and hopes to involve all those who "subscribe to the importance of the preservation of cultural and architectural heritage that all of the Lebanese share". Over the course of two out of three planned events in a period of 9 months, the project – for which MAJAL teamed up with Marie-Claude Bitar as event organizer and Liliane Barakat from St. Joseph University for historical documentation – organized an initial bus tour, guided walking tours, a 'light and sound' show about the area<sup>149</sup>, a short film with oral history interviews (the documentary discussed in the preceding section about UMAM), a photo exhibition of life in the area today, a 'traditional food' market, a number of discussion sessions, as well as the publication of informational materials about the area. In the words of the press statement: "We aim to benefit as much as possible from the many opportunities that Zoqaq al-Blat offers us to highlight its institutional and human capital, in the framework of the speedy rejuvenation of this neighbourhood".

In the next chapter I discuss this project with more detailed attention to what it amounted to in practice, in particular the connections people from the project were able to make – with media, politicians and people with varying ties to the neighbourhood. Here, as per the general aim of this chapter, I maintain focus on its self-understanding – as a civil society project – and extricate its conceptualizations of state, society and nation. I start with the idea(l) of the nation that animated the project's ambitions. The project is interesting for the purposes of this chapter, because it

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149 The show – an animation film with accompanying atmospheric light projections – reached back to the Phoenicians and described their seafaring exploits and more particularly their invention of the alphabet. The project at several points drew an explicit continuity between the beginning of the alphabet and Zoqaq al-Blat's printed culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This fits within a particular kind of imagination of Lebanon (found in part both among bourgeois intellectual circles and the Christian population) that Liliane Barakat also invoked during a conference: "after all, we're pretty proud of the Phoenician alphabet". More pragmatically though, the connection with the Phoenician Alphabet was the basis for their successful bid to secure funding from the 'Beirut Book Capital 2010' foundation.

Promotional materials for the Zoqaq Reborn project. Below a comparison from the Mukhayyesh mansion in the 1950s and 2009.



allows us to get a more precise sense of civil society's political imagination. The ideals its protagonists tended to stand for were projected – and thus specified in greater illustrative detail – onto (the history of) a neighbourhood: Zoqaq al-Blat. Specifically, that neighbourhood was seen to have embodied an ideal of a 'proto-secular' (that is, religiously plural but peacefully coexisting) society and a cosmopolitan culture. It did so during the so-called Arab Renaissance, which roughly runs from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Renaissance (*Nahda*) combined the bloom of printed culture (in literature and press) following the adaptation of the Arabic alphabet to the printing press; the modernization of society, for instance by the adoption of new peda-

gological philosophies; and dreams of national Arab independence (from Ottoman and European overlords). Cairo is generally considered to be the centre of all that movement, but Beirut had its own role to play, not in the least by serving as host to the first Arabic printing press.

For the second round of guided tours, the project also produced a short film about the history of Beirut and Zoqaq al-Blat's role in it. The film became the start of the guided tour, screened in the chapel of the Greek-Catholic school. The film picked up on themes found in all the project's publication materials and served to illustrate in greater detail the historical imagination just outlined. It consisted of a narrator accompanying a number of historical images. The narrator explained the area "prosper because of the religious diversity and the installation of the grand families<sup>150</sup>". Striking about this diversity is that "despite differences, the inhabitants coexist in symbiosis" and thus "cultural movements flourish and diversify". It is also the place where the fundamental questions of the Lebanese nation and the co-existence of its sects were posed for the first time by the intellectual avant-garde. 'Who are we?', was Boutros Boustani's "famous question"<sup>151</sup>. His answer, so the narrator went on to explain, was that the different genealogies to which members of each community trace their identity are actually "factors of our weakness". His and other intellectuals' humanist ideals thus made them into pioneer citizens. The new ideas that arose out of the area's diversity went hand in hand with other valuable developments: associational activity, the expansion of science and knowledge, its institutionalization in schools and its distribution through publishers, in particular linguistic knowledge and study. Moreover, the narrator explained, these pioneers were important in showing us that learning foreign languages is a source of knowledge (and can be used to strengthen rather than weaken Arab culture)<sup>152</sup>. Those familiar with Lebanon will immediately recognize themes important to many of the (bourgeois) intelligentsia that this film conveys: the misgivings about sectarianism (both as cause and as result of the war), the cele-

150 The grand or great families, i.e., those (Beiruti) families that became wealthy in the economic surge of the time and managed to hold on to their economic and especially political privileges over the generations to follow.

151 One of the prime intellectuals of the Lebanese province in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Worked on the Arabic translation of the Bible, dabbled in Arabic linguistics and pedagogy, and wrote (Syrian) nationalist pamphlets in shocked reaction to the Druze-Christian 'civil war' in 1860. Also founded a sort of non-confessional school in Zoqaq al-Blat.

152 Somewhat ironically, the movie was set to French (a fact that met with some murmurs from the public). However, most of the people in the audience most likely spoke French anyways, as the guided tours in French were the most numerous and the largest, followed by English and then Arabic. (When the only Arabic tour guide turned out to be a veiled student, a friend remarked: *oh my, could they [the USJ] have been anymore stereotypical?*)

bration of civil society (rich associational activity that forms the backbone of a peaceful society), and cosmopolitanism (a Lebanon that is rooted as much in the West as in the East). To varying degrees and in varying forms, these themes are equally important in civil society. The neighbourhood was therefore made to symbolize in many ways the reform project of civil society in Lebanon more generally.

Which are the institutions and actors that project directors with such an historical and national imagination would identify as partners and public? The documentary mentioned "pioneer citizens". What kind of vision of Zoqaq al-Blat's citizens did MAJAL et al. have, whom did they appeal to and mobilize to do what? The identification first requires a diagnosis of the problem, which, perhaps unsurprisingly, turns out to be a nation degenerated into (or at least in danger of degenerating into) the opposite of its historical ideal. In an introduction to the project's mission statement, president of St. Joseph University René Chamoussi expressed the hope it could bring people 'from different places' together. Serge Yazigi, MAJAL's director, explicated the reasoning behind that hope. He wanted the project to recreate some of that historical symbiosis and cross-community cooperation. One of the main problems of Beirut, he said, is that it is falling apart into islands of communities tightly knit into their own piece of urban fabric, with nothing to tie them together. (Interview July 2009) This is a result of the civil war, for sure, but the current destruction of the old urban fabric (to make way for new 'tower' developments) is making the problem worse. That is why the tourist trail could be so important, because it would connect these different spaces for people who have never or not for a long time made it 'across'. For the events themselves, he hoped that, when people do make it across, and they'd see the neighbourhood and its beauty and recognize its history as their own, they would start caring for it much like they would for their own neighbourhoods. (So that when a building faces the threat of demolition, they perceive it as a threat to their own space and will jump into action, building a stronger front for the preservation of what we have left of that history.)

Yazigi therefore located the project's 'citizens' in the first instance outside of the neighbourhood. He wanted them to do one thing: to 'care'. He was not very specific about how, but generally speaking, to help exert pressure on government to take appropriate action (for more on exert pressure and on the kind of appropriate action he was thinking of, see a few paragraphs down). He also located his target citizens in the neighbourhood itself, though. In a sense, they were the primary public, when they first starting thinking about 'urban regeneration through culture'. But as they found little resonance (see Introduction), they figured they needed



outsiders looking in in order to open the eyes of ‘the community’. Maybe then they could realize the real objective: to get representatives of and organizations of the different communities rooted in the neighbourhood to cooperate. “[Ultimately], we don’t care about the buildings, maybe we won’t succeed in saving them, but the social and cultural fabric [is what counts]” (interview July 2009).

For not only between neighbourhoods, but also within the neighbourhood, people retreat into their ever decreasing social spaces. The different communities, their institutions, even in a diverse area such as Zoqaq al-Blat, don’t talk with one another. Yazigi told of the difficult beginnings of the project, when “nobody believed in it”. When people told them that the country had more pressing issues to deal with, when the mistrust among community representatives towards each other as well as towards the project was palpable. But with their enthusiasm and persistence, Yazigi & Co. were able to start things moving a bit, and they called out whom they deemed to be the primary stakeholders – the heads of the different religious, educational and cultural establishments in the area – as well as some press to a general meeting. The meeting took place on the premises of the prime Sunni charity, the Maqassed. At a certain point during the meeting, one of the religious representatives got up, and made a confession. Yazigi quoted him to me:

“At the start we didn’t believe in you, in the project, [it would be] yet another one that would do nothing at all, but now I have to say, ‘shame on us,’ that we haven’t taken action ourselves before, because this is for us, for our neighbourhood, in which we are rooted. I offer my apologies, in the name of my colleagues, whom I do not know. I have lived here for decades and I do not know you. This is the first time I set foot in your establishment”.

This is obviously a key moment for Yazigi, a step towards the reconstitution of the cosmopolitan spirit of the neighbourhood, towards rebuilding some of that cross-community cooperation, and thus to rekindle its torch. The significance of the apology aside, the community and the stakeholders in the neighbourhood were apparently identified firstly on the basis of the official confessional communities, and were, secondly, confined to (the representatives of) the official institutions and organizations of these communities: the managers of the schools, houses of worship and administrative seats, but also social organizations such as the scouts, which are tied to the political parties that represent each confession. This particular operationalization of ‘the community’ follows in part from the urbanist

nature of the project. It follows the buildings as it were: the most prominent patrimonial buildings of the area are those that belong to a religious endowment (*waqf*). This social and legal characteristic of these buildings also implies that they are not (as) likely to be sold and that there are some funds available for their renovation and maintenance. It also falls in line, however, with the diagnosis of the problem: that Lebanon is falling apart into islands of confessional communities, each failing to identify with a shared identity (and as a consequence, the powers that be are able to parcel up the public good and run away with the loot).

I recap briefly. In line with the outline of the ideal nation – based on the historical ideal type Yazigi and Barakat reconstructed – the project sought to encourage citizens to be part of something bigger, to share an identity and protect what is valuable – to not let vested (material) interests and the corresponding short-sighted politics have the vote on what happens. The citizens it identified – or the publics it addressed – are mainly two in kind: people outside of the neighbourhood, ignorant of the area's value but “likely to be interested in matters of heritage” (Yazigi); and representatives of communal (confessional) institutions and organizations, familiar with the area, but seemingly ignorant of its true value. Each public has a slightly different role to play, even though Yazigi & Co. seemingly had not thought on any concrete level on what that might be: they expected, or at least hoped, the outsiders to exert pressure on government in face of vital threats to the nation's heritage, while the communities needed to dialogue and work together.

There is one last pillar of civil society that had an important role to play, in Yazigi's eye: the media. The media had to buttress the work they were trying to do with their publics. They were supposed to make the outsider citizens “feel ‘guilty’ – but in a pleasant way. We want them to encounter the neighbourhood in a playful manner and keep hearing about, like in the media, then hopefully something will stick” (Interview July 2009). However, they also hoped the media would act as autonomous pressure cooker on the government. They always invited the press to attend their events. “We didn't miss a single opportunity to talk to radio and television, so people knew something was up in Zoqaq al-Blat” (Interview October 2009). I will explain a bit further below why they thought it was necessary to exert pressure on (local) government. For now, in terms of the ideological complex of civil society, it suffices to draw attention to the media's symbolic importance (it's obviously hard to gauge whether it was practically effective). Yazigi considers this use of the media as a public sort of lobbying technique: getting government officials and media in the same place, getting the media to apply pressure “from the



bottom-up”, which is “a kind of lobbying that is quite weak in Lebanon” (Interview July 2009). So, for example, Yazigi recalled that at the end of the EU Archimedes project, they presented the results of their study and called on the government officials who were present to act on their recommendations, “in front of the media”, that they had made sure to invite as well.

The project’s relation to Lebanese ‘society’ was therefore double. On the one hand, the organizers sought to marshal allies in what is basically some version of madani society: informed citizens who care about the public good, who call on the state to live up to its representative responsibilities; as well as the media, who play an important part in informing citizens as well, and, in doing so, exert pressure on government. On the other hand, it addressed the institutions that, in the Lebanese civil society imagination of things, would be part of ahli society. They were identified as conservative actors, stuck in their own world and difficult to approach. Still, they were not only seen as inherent adversaries or obstacles, but also as possible sources of the solution. At least some might yet play a progressive role. (Not all though – there was much deep-seated doubt about the political parties. Both Yazigi and Barakat expressed their worries about how they would react to their initiative, and we have seen in the Introduction.) As to the ordinary residents of the neighbourhood, who have thus far shone by their absence, they were in fact “another chapter”, in Yazigi’s words, to commence only if the current one is successfully written.

Ultimately though, society would have to act upon the state as well, crucial in the protection of national heritage. That state is conceived of as an organ that has to be convinced by rational arguments and coaxed into action through public (media) pressure. The importance of making the right argument fits into a certain Enlightenment ideal (cf. Flyvbjerg 1998) of the democratic state that is an important ideological support for civil society, in general and in Lebanon especially.<sup>153</sup> This conception shows in Yazigi’s discourse in various ways. For instance, while the Archimedes study had taught him the local authorities such as the municipality do in

153 A comparison with LADE’s approach to the state may provide depth to this perspective. Nayla played with the notion of ‘political’ in the following way: “We are an organization on political issues, let’s say, I mean the *electoral law itself is a highly political issue – but we do perceive it in a different way*. We do not care about who will win or lose in the elections – but we do care about the process to be fair, transparent; we do care also about an electoral law that brings dynamics for change. If the people want to change, [our new] electoral law will give them that chance but not the current one, which forbids any real change in power.” (Interview date May 2009; my emphasis) This also resonates with Yes to Dialogue’s introduction to the post-election special with Baroud. Doing politics in a non-political way.

fact possess competencies that allow them to intervene in the urban process productively, the municipality doesn't apply them because it "lacks a vision". (Granted, he also said it lacked desire and courage, which would point to an acknowledgment of 'political' dimensions, but that still leaves intact the idea that rational action is primary in state operations, only to be polluted by politics and self-interest.) Similarly, when a new municipal council was installed after the 2010 spring elections, Majal et al. wanted to convene a meeting with them to *explain* why the 'parking and mobility' agenda of the new council was mistaken in its 'vision' (of how the city could be made to work). Also, tropes like initially 'not believing in it' or 'doubting it could work' abounded in how Yazigi's descriptions of his encounters with state and civil society, and indicate a cognitivist qualification of the problem – it was a matter of a correct perception of problems and solutions. In the same vein, he recounted how he took the municipal council – located at the edge of Zoqaq al-Blat – out for a tour in the neighbourhood, because they didn't actually know it. One presumes he did so in the assumption that proper knowledge would change council members' minds and positions. And in July 2009, that assumption seemed vindicated.

Even the municipality, we've been trying to get through to them for a long time, without success. Now, a couple of days ago, suddenly someone whom we think will be the next president of the municipal council calls me, [saying] 'Serge, you really stuck it out, we have to see each other once this is over, to see what we can do for the other neighbourhoods. Maybe expropriating a few buildings [to repurpose them for public ends] might not be enough'. This is the first time we're starting to talk vision, logics, strategies, etc.. We don't know what's going to happen. It's probably also with a political goal in mind, like in every municipality – I mean, maybe it'll go in his new political program. If they use us, that's fine with me, as long as we get to do what we need to.

Finally, they seemed to have been able to move the state to discuss "vision, logics and strategies" – the way it was supposed to have operated all this time. Admittedly, the latter part of the quote also shows it's not entirely an idealization of the state as a rational body, even as it does not change the basic mechanism of his analysis: if the people express their desire clearly, the state might just follow. A similar 'political' analysis holds for his assessment that, now that they've gotten public attention, things are moving in the right direction, because a few members of the

council are able to compete for points on this issue. In this kind of analysis, members of state still respond to the public will and would do so on the basis of rational policy considerations.

All in all, Yazigi presented an optimistic discourse. Most likely, the presentation of his version of events to me and other audiences were part of the campaign. He did hint at things happening behind the scenes that he probably had certain reservations about, but he didn't share them with me or in public performances. However, rather than being a personal, idiosyncratic trait, this is symptomatic for Lebanese civil society – because 'it' happens 'in public', certain features of political processes retreat to the background. That is a crucial point I belabour in the final section below. The next chapter meanwhile will pick up on and play with this tension between the ideological core of the civil society, found functionally and logically 'in public', and the pragmatic strategies by civil society members, behind the scenes.

### **'Civil society': cosmopolitan secularism and non-political politics**

What then is 'civil society'? It is quite close in political ideology to the secular beliefs of Hansen's (2013) Indian middle classes. The dreams are similar, even if there are differences that arise out of the respective (post-colonial) histories. One striking similarity is the distinction between the cultural and social domains and 'politics' (one that resonates undoubtedly in many more countries). What the distinction means differs between these two cases, but what is at stake is the same: to avoid the messy realities of politics. In India, the 'cultural' is essentially what is the confession in Lebanon. (Many people in civil society would agree that it should be kept out of politics, but that means something different in Lebanon. More on that further down.) The 'cultural' for civil society in Lebanon refers to something akin to high culture – related to the arts and to intellectual life (think of film or heritage). It presents a domain from which to think about the Lebanese nation-state and from which to engage both nation and state. When people in 'civil society' talk about the 'social' ("social things"), meanwhile, instead of the life of the religious community, they mean the life of the oecumene. It is what one might call 'national cosmopolitanism', which consists first and foremost of professing and practicing tolerance towards other sects, but secondarily, though ideally, also of being versed in the (idealized) ways of the Western world. This national cosmopolitanism is what Indians called secularism. Being 'secular' or 'cosmopolitan' is an ideal for individuals to embody (especially public figures in the first case; especially ordinary citizens in the second); but it is accompanied by an ideal for the state. Perhaps that ideal

may be called 'technocratic', in that it puts its faith in proper procedures, in expert bureaucrats who impartially carry out regulations (cf. Hansen 2013: 209). Hansen (with Yadav) discusses the example of the Electoral Commission and the deployment of a new technology to limit fraud (ibid: 224); in Lebanon, the 'za'im of civil society', PM Baroud, might serve as an equivalent example, as the true Lebanese bureaucrat on which many had pinned their hopes for progress.

The distinction also leads to a particular conception of the 'struggle'. The commitment to the public good – as good 'cosmopolitan' / 'secular' citizens – implies a certain engagement with the state: the state needs to be called to its public task by such citizens. In so far as a member of "civil society" engages in what you would ordinarily call "politics", therefore, it is a general sort of battle, not a partisan one: a battle to enhance transparency, democratic governance and to protect the public good and the idea of the (cosmopolitan) nation. To do otherwise would mean getting bogged down in status quo "politics", the dirty politics of those serving their own (personal or communal) purposes. Not only is that fight a dirty one, it risks exacerbating the problem that civil society members precisely hope to overcome (or at least steer clear from): the communal differences and divergences that threaten to undermine the very country they're trying to build up.

This could also account for the discursive practice of not 'getting political'. As we have seen, most of these organization police 'talking politics', that is, discussing the political scene in Lebanon in (personal) detail. While it is customary to talk about the (faults of) the Lebanese system, one is not supposed to mention actual political actors that make use of this system. One can think of still other reasons why the avoidance of ('messy' or 'dirty' politics) would occur. The funding structures of NGOs would be one. Most of the NGOs (and certainly those discussed in this chapter) are supported by foreign donors. Few of these donors have an overtly politicized outlook themselves and even if they (or their individual members) did, supporting local organizations that are tied to events that stir up certain trouble is hazardous to the continuity of their operations in Lebanon. They are therefore unlikely to encourage (i.e., fund) overtly political project proposals. Also, in part through these funding structures, the type of non-political or depoliticizing language and sociological imagination that characterizes global civil society is bound to have some sort of influence on how local participants in 'civil society' perceive and frame their challenges (e.g., as documented in Ferguson 1994). Then there are local language ideologies tied to the history of war: the widely accepted idea that the social peace in Lebanon is extremely fragile and will tear if people

get up close and personal (i.e., if people get specific). While these are all relevant reasons, one still has to wonder why such ideas would translate into discursive practices in any given situation.

Another part of the answer must be found in the resolutely public nature of 'civil society'. It 'lives' primarily in public. In part, this has to do with the fact 'civil society' is a space for (young) people from which to imagine a different Lebanon, but also practice or rehearse it in a more visceral way. The intensity of the political desires should not be underestimated – nor should the gravitas of Lebanon's problems (economic, social, political) in people's eyes be taken too lightly. This publicness, in which people can live this other Lebanon, is key to understanding 'civil society'. The Zoqaq al-Blat project is iconic of civil society in this respect. With its various events, it created a similar – albeit temporary – space-time of events, talks, and exhibitions that allowed people to reflect, sometimes passively, sometimes by participation, on the nature of Lebanese society and its challenges. That is in fact but a microcosm of what civil society is at large. It consists of sites collectively created and re-created by a partially networked assemblage of NGOs, film screenings, debates, cafés, and festivals, which share audiences (constituencies, one is tempted to say, with a wink to the sociological imagination of Lebanese "civil society"), dreams and goals, and crucially, discursive practices.

These practices therefore depend crucially on what we might call the ecological conditions of enunciation. The complex of initiatives and organizations build up to a broad range of events that invite some form of public reflexivity. The fact that these events share audiences creates a certain familiarity among attendees, as well as a degree of co-constitution and intertextuality among these events. This consistency is one of the conditions of possibility for 'civil society' – as a way of understanding and debating Lebanon – to exist. It's the horizon of enunciation, if you will, freely after Michael Warner's (2005) studies of *el público*. Despite the familiarity that people have with each other, though, there are always strangers on this horizon of enunciation. Hence these events are still explicitly public engagements, that is, open-ended in their address and uncertain of their reception. That strengthens an ideological notion that addressing *the* public is what being civil is all about, i.e. being able to dialogue and maintain cohesion despite differences. It is also a favourable 'ecological' condition for the relevance of the reasons mentioned above: the caution against incendiary language, or the general depoliticizing tendency in the sociological imagination of (the developmental, NGO type of) civil society (in as far as one can presume it has trickled into Lebanese circles).

**Conclusion** Let me bring this characterization of civil society more explicitly into the fold of this thesis. How does the sectarian system figure into the imagination of who people ‘in’ civil society think they are? As we’ve seen, their conceptualization of that system is two-fold: it is treated as a legal system based on the recognition and mediation of confessional communities. The electoral system is the prime example of that legal system. It is also seen as a cultural ‘system’, if you will, in which confessional differences have been hardened into boundaries and where mistrust results in latent tensions that may quickly escalate. Somewhere in between there is a category of politicians that exploit these tensions and abuse the weaknesses of the politico-legal system to further their own personal or sectarian interests. That combo constitutes *the* political challenge to members of civil society. The task is to reduce the hold of conservative or even reactionary powers-that-be over society by creating a transparent and rational state that condition political leaders to place the public good central in the state’s operations.

The vocabulary people deploy to formulate that challenge draws upon civil society’s (global) imagination of the liberal democratic state as well as older Lebanese consociational and cosmopolitan traditions. ‘Civil society’ here functions as a moral community, as a set of discursive repertoires that in their exercise offer a moral horizon against which one can see how society could be organized. It can also exhibit what the modern citizen should stand for. It is crucial to note that people in civil society call upon each other to be “citizens”. It is a subject position that cannot be realized in the current Lebanese society (it is impossible to be a full citizen in a confessional system), but embodying it in civil society is the condition of possibility for its realization (in a future secular legal order).

These points clearly constitute differences with this world of Khandaq. Most evident is the position vis-à-vis sectarianism. Whereas people in civil society situate themselves *outside* of the sectarian system, and occupy the position of the *neutral* citizen (see picture on next page), people in Khandaq are always part of that sectarian system, in the sense that sectarian identification is obvious and foundational, and that they have a relation to ‘their’ (confessional) party. This is the fundamental difference, ultimately, between these two worlds. However, as we’ve seen, that people ‘foot’ themselves within the sectarian landscape does not imply they are wholly encapsulated by it. They draw on an alternative vocabulary, of “the people” and “ordinary men”, to critically evaluate goings-on in sectarian Lebanon. The kind of critical evaluations are different though. Abu Zalem’s draws on historical Arab Nationalism to formulate his critique of secularism. (Granted, his is a far more pronounced version of



"I am secular", during a 'Laique Pride March' (2010).

this anti-sectarianism than any that I've encountered in Khandaq outside of Abu Zalem's group, but it's still representative of a tendency.) Arab Nationalism is a controversial movement in Lebanese history that many in civil society would relegate to political 'ideology'. Conversely, someone like Abu Zalem is disparaging about the "secularism" of civil society, which is more akin to the French *laïcité* ("Laique Pride" is actually a annually recurring march advocating secularism in Lebanon, organized by various 'activists'), seeing it as a part of the imposition of western powers and their geopolitical agendas, and probably as something that reeks of anti-religiousness. The more fundamental difference, though, is that statements like Abu Zalem's occur side-by-side with firm discursive implantations of roots in the confessional universe (of the Shia universe, in this particular case).

That implantation also implies a different relation to 'being political' or 'politics'. If one is already part of the sectarian world, one cannot be contaminated by it. One can see the very 'political' nature of a speech like Abu Zalem's in that light (it is quite specific in the names it names, even to the point Abu Zalem deemed it strategically wise to shut himself up, as he was disqualifying people who were allies to his own party). Yet one shouldn't overestimate such an ideational grounding of discursive practice – the materiality of the discursive context primes. We can explain the differences in ways of talking in part in reference to the same ecological criteria. Co-present talk in Khandaq arises out of daily or otherwise frequent meetings in non-exclusive but relatively bounded groups.



Conversations are more or less continuous (and repetitive), much like in civil society, but more strongly and fluidly so. The effect is to create a kind of public intimacy. That intimacy cancels out the widely accepted norm that to 'talk politics' or to 'get into names' is not done or dangerous, as one is better able to place the audience and how they might receive statements. My presumption is that the very same people would adhere, at least to a certain degree, to that public norm outside of their neighbourhood associations (note that for example Abu Zalem's Arab Nationalism speech was performed in the presence of visitors from another neighbourhood). The materiality of the speech context decisively mediates genres of public speech.

All this should not obscure some important convergences though between the two styles of imagination. If we reconsider Abu Zalem's lament at the state of Arab Nationalism today, his version of secularism actually bears a striking parallel to civil society's national cosmopolitanism. Both decry the out-of-bounds, 'passionate' sectarianism, the kind that leads to violence. On a more fundamental level, however, both identify a comparable, vital problem with the state as well: it does not act responsively and responsibly towards its citizens. Marked differences only subsequently arise in the ways of conceiving this problem, as well as its solutions. Civil society folks ("citizens") have an ideal of the rights procedures (rational bureaucracy, transparency, etc.), whereas members of the people ("ordinary men") desire "fairness", that it "does right by" them. The latter demand reticence by political leaders, whereas the first believe only in the disciplining power of proper regulation. Still, the fact that the two do not in fact diverge as much as one might think having read this chapter and the previous one should give reason to pause. In fact, that pause should provide the springing board to Chapter 6, in which I caution against highlighting and hypostasizing these differences into a dichotomous understanding of citizenship in the postcolonial world.



## Chapter 6:

# Political subjectivity in the interstices of theory

The discussion in the preceding chapter of the ideological complex of civil society has primarily drawn attention to the differences between 'civil society' and the discursive space of the neighbourhood of Khandaq. I've also drawn attention to how people from each world perceive the other as different. You will recall from the previous chapter Abu Zalem's alienation from the cultural and political elite of the country, who value all the wrong things and honour all the wrong people. From the Introduction you will remember how difficult it was for the people from the Zoqaq al-Blat project to engage the population, not in the least because of their ideas of 'sectarian society'. Yet it is significant that even though people from both sides express a sense of difference and distance, those differences are of a greater concern for civil society folks. The lack they perceive among the people constitutes the very essence of what it means to be 'in' civil society: it is one of the prime obstacles to the progress that society needs and which 'civil society' struggles for. Interestingly, social scientific theories of citizenship resonate with 'civil society's conception of the order of social things. These theories identify or presume, on one side, a citizenship that Lebanese civil society also works towards and to a certain extent enacts (i.e. a space for individuals, informed, who engage in advocacy and enlist media platforms to further their cause): a citizenship akin to the ideal typical citizen of ideal typical liberal democracies. On the other side, there is a citizenship for people who are actually deprived of the socio-cultural and legal preconditions for that kind of engagement with others and with state and politics, and who find other ways of making do. In this chapter I question and qualify the usefulness of that opposition in understanding the differences between Khandaq and 'civil society'. At the end of the chapter, I show how an examination of political subjectivity may do more justice to these differences. Let me first review various influential authors who have con-

templated the nature of such distinctive forms of citizenship, in the context of post-colonial states.

While these authors are not all explicitly in conversation with each other (though some are), there are genealogical links tying them together. The most ground-breaking work was done in the 'Subaltern Studies' group. The South-Asian scholars that made up this group in the early 1980s had taken to explore the position of Gramsci's "subaltern classes" – the oppressed, the subordinate, the downtrodden – on the Asian subcontinent, in all its relational complexity. In other words, their project was precisely about bringing into empirical and theoretical focus those people marginal to the central order, and thus the people who most likely would qualify as being a different kind of citizen. On the basis of these exploration some of the first outlines of a theory of differential insertions into state-projects were formulated. James Scott's work is a second influential account, and one tied loosely to the Subaltern school. He brings in a more traditional political scientific account of marginality, whereas much of the focus of the Subaltern Studies was on knowledge production and identity. The union of these two approaches constituted a rough framework in which others followed. The basic premise of all this work is that there are spheres of society, social activities or populations that fall outside of the grasp or purview of the state (we can see the continuities here with Simone here and why he would be attracted to Deleuze-Guattari<sup>154</sup>). From that position of relative invisibility (Holston 1998, Boeck 2014) or marginality (Subaltern Studies, Simone 2010), the question is how they *do* encounter the state (primarily, and 'society' as the body of other citizens, secondarily).

In order to address that question, these scholars tend to work with a dual conception of citizenship. Qualifications of, let's call it, the marginal kind of citizenship range from ones more in line with more conventional political theory, such as "informal" citizenship (Singerman 1995), to more exciting ones like Holston's (1998; 2008) "insurgent" citizenship, to different qualifications of a special political logic at play, such as Chatterjee's (2002) "political society" or Simone's (2010) "anticipatory politics". These forms are juxtaposed to a citizenship we think we are familiar with in democratic, constitutional states. The duality can be explicit (as in Singerman, who distances her approach from those who stare blindly on formal definition of citizenship and politics; or in Chatterjee, who

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154 Of course, Foucault was central to the Subaltern project (though not to Scott's), so post-structuralism was always in some way part of this body of work and the step to Deleuze is not entirely out of the ordinary.

opposes political society to the more well-known civil kind of society) or implicit to varying degrees. Still the 'other side' is always present as the conceptual and theoretical background against which the author is building her argument.

As we will see, one of the crucial points of differentiation tends to be the non-ideological nature of marginalized citizenship<sup>155</sup>. Thus, if we look at the formulation of what Scott called "informal, covert" "everyday resistance" in his influential *Weapons of the Weak*:

To require of lower-class resistance that it somehow be "principled" or "selfless" is not only utopian and a slander on the moral status of fundamental needs; it is, more fundamentally, a misconstruction of the basis of class struggle, which, first and foremost, a struggle over the appropriation of work, production, property, and taxes. "Bread-and-butter" issues are the essence of lower-class politics. Consumption, from this perspective, is both the goal and the result of resistance and counterresistance. It is precisely the fusion of self-interest and resistance that is the vital force animating the resistance of peasants and proletarians. When a peasant hides part of his crop to avoid paying taxes, he is both filling his stomach and depriving the state of grain. (Scott 1985: 296)

Scott is calling here for an extension of our understanding of politics, beyond the "direct, symbolic confrontation with authority" (id.: xiv), like addressing the state 'as a matter of principle', within the political field. Instead we should look for the fusion of "self-interest and resistance", by means of informal networks in everyday settings and actions. 'Popular politics' is therefore presented rather straightforwardly as calculation; whatever role political consciousness, ideology or ideals may play in this game, it is downplayed<sup>156</sup>.

Of the aforementioned authors, Chatterjee takes the distinction between the principled kind and the strategic kind of politics and citizenship to its most explicit levels. He takes up the Subaltern and Scottean differentiation in order to make an intervention in a different though related theoretical debate: that on the nature of civil society. The result of that cross-fertilization is also fruitful for us, as it clarifies the stakes and consequences of working with the distinction. Below I therefore discuss his work more extensively.

155 with the possible exception of Holston's work, to whom I shall return.

156 Downplayed to the status of what Scott called a 'moral economy' in his earlier work.

### **Civil vs. political society: the logic of rights and the logic of alliance**

In Chatterjee's work on 'political society', his principle bone of contention is with theorists of 'civil society'. His bone concerns an often formulated point of critique brought up against civil society theorists, which is that the intension of the concept often does not seem to correspond to its extension. Let me build up to this point of critique in due steps. Civil society as a concept gained traction through the experiences and theorisations of political activism in former Soviet Bloc societies and authoritarian regimes in Latin America (in the 1980s). Activists as well as academics understood this type of activism as one growing out of 'society' against the 'state'. Later, academics looking at Western societies would understand in similar terms social activism against the negative influences that the '(free) market' has on 'society'. Civil society is able to sustain such resistance, because it constitutes and cultivates a special space within 'society' at large. Thus, Walzer defines civil society as "the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology – that fill this space" (2003: 306). Such uncoerced human association is characterized by "habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness" (Putnam 2003: 326), informed by De Tocqueville's "self-interest properly understood", and contributes both to the "transformation of conflict through the creation of common consciousness and political judgment" (Barber 2003: 244) and "the effectiveness and stability of democratic government" (Putnam 2003: 326).

This very basic overview of some of the principle protagonists of this perspective suffices to indicate two basic dimensions crucial to civil society theory. The first is conceptual: institutions, people and actions are understood to be part of different 'spheres' in or of society (in Walzer's definition, "spaces"); most accounts include a sphere of society, state and economy. Such spheres are relatively autonomous and internally coherent domains of social activity that are at odds with others, because their types of social activity and functional requirements differ. The second dimension is that the theoretical models are grounded in a normative preoccupation: the societal sphere is generally regarded as containing meaningful relations and activities that are under threat of potentially destructive activities in the two other spheres. In a sense, this is a folk sociology of contemporary Western society. It represents normative ideas about how modern society should be organized, and how it should function, with roots in political philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, popularized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century politics of liberal and social-democratic states.

The (at times) rather unreflexive normativity of these theories has attracted concerns from various corners. Critiques range from questions

about the validity of the sectoral or spherical ontology (e.g. Edwards & Foley 1998) to whether civil society really is characterized by equality, 'trust' and of the rights and duties of citizens (e.g. Wiktorowicz 2000). Wiktorowicz' point has also been raised in a different kind of argument that questions whether civil society everywhere is really civil society. In part this has to do with the socio-political constellations (these liberal and social-democratic states) that were presupposed in civil society theory. Thus, Karlström (2003) concludes from his look at NGOs in Uganda that these often do not operate "independently" from the state at all. His and Wiktorowicz' answer is therefore, well it may look like civil society, but it's certainly different. (Gellner 1994 took a somewhat more dogmatic stance and concluded that as long as individual and associational 'autonomy' didn't exist, "civil society" couldn't exist either.) In response, other authors countered that, well, it may look different, but in essence it's like civil society. Thus, Kamali (2001, for an historical case) and Herbert (2003, for contemporary Egypt) have argued that if you dispense with the "ethnocentric bias" in the conceptual specifics, civil society is a relevant framework for, in their case, the Middle East. This answer in itself raised the question how far we should stretch the empirical extension of the notion of civil society, or put differently, in how far one could 'dilute' the received conceptual apparatus of civil society.

As far as Chatterjee's response (e.g., 2002) to that last question goes, his unease parallels that of most critics of civil society theory, but the way he draws upon his intellectual roots in Subaltern Studies also distinguishes him from these others. He does so notably in two main ways. The Subaltern Studies group had challenged the notion of an even integration of (post) colonial subjects into society and state. As Chatterjee explains (2002: 62), one of the core propositions of the group was that there was a division between an elite and a subaltern political domain. His ideas about civil society can be seen as an update to that original proposition. In addition, the Subaltern group was concerned with developing a positive social theory of (post-colonial) society (rather than merely observing that things are not as they are in the West). Chatterjee's (and others') research into colonial modes of governance therefore led him to critically re-examine the political scientific (and philosophical) categories with which one could analyse political and social orders. Again, he makes a similar move in his discussion of the 'western' concept of civil society.

His answer to the definitional problem of civil society then is to split off "civil society" from a mirror concept dubbed "political society". The former concept should be reserved for action through voluntary organizations, typically formed around shared political interests (as it was used

by activists and early theorists). That is, a mode of action that citizenry, as members of a political community endowed with certain rights (the way Hegel envisioned citizens to be). He then introduces political society for all other types of association, to be used to understand those social constellations that do not form part of that citizenry – people who are treated as populations, to be targeted and managed (in the way Foucault thought about governmentality). The state deals with each ‘society’ in different ways, and (correspondingly) people within these groupings defend their interests through different mechanisms. Thus in political society, Chatterjee notes, we see a type of clientelist political leaders emerge that act as mediators between the governmental sphere and society. In such cases, groupings are not recognized as actual citizens, capable or worthy of direct interaction, but through mediation resources and some privileges are still redistributed their way. In civil society, by contrast, citizens who live and operate within the legal framework provided by the constitution, people band together in what we have come to call non-governmental organizations, and tend to subscribe to the modernizing ideal of liberal democracy, as something to realize to ever greater degrees. By describing these two ‘logics’, Chatterjee makes a distinction here, much like Scott, between citizens that are “principled” and perhaps even “selfless” (Scott) and citizens that are strategic, “calculating”.

It is elegant as a solution to civil society’s definitional conundrum. By being strict about the criteria of what counts as civil society, it rescues the concept from referential vacuity. However, that very strictness also entails the risk of hypostasizing it and its counterpart. Perhaps one may phrase the problem thus: it does not rescue civil society from its normativity. The notion of rights-bearing citizens who appeal the state on a rational basis is but an Enlightenment ideal that is only partially realized in liberal democracies. As Flyvbjerg (1998) shows and explains, even in Denmark, the most rational and democratic of all rational democracies, the state’s rationality is often but the rationalization of power relations. Still, Chatterjee does believe civil society to “actually exist” in the post-colony, albeit “demographically limited” (even if he doesn’t specify such a ‘demography’ ethnographically, apart from short circumscriptions like the description of civil society above).

How would the distinction between these two kinds of ‘society’, or ‘(political) logics’, fare in Beirut? To answer that question for the first concept, ‘civil society’, we need to go beyond Lebanese civil society’s self-understanding (i.e., its public culture), in order to look at how its associational activities are organized. I explore the tensions that arise between the public ideals that people in civil society stand and strive for (as detailed in

Chapter 5) and the strategies they (have to) devise to reach their operational goals. I then move on to the 'other side' to consider whether we can see Khandaq as a case of political society, and if so, how far that can take us in addressing what citizenship means to its residents and what they make out of it? In this chapter, therefore, I ask what being embedded in either kind of 'logic' would look like and what it would do for one's sense of citizenship.

### **Pragmatic programs to protect Beirut's architectural patrimony**

The examples I draw from below all stem from (urban) heritage activism. I have followed these projects with an interest in how people perceive and shape the fate of Beirut as a polis for the new Lebanon, after the end of the civil war, as well as how people find or claim a voice in the capital's clamour. Yet, the myriad of activities that deal expressly with the city as such have not found their way into this text merely because of a selection bias. They do speak to widely shared concerns in Beirut. During the period of my fieldwork there was a marked resurgence of media attention and projects that thematized urban heritage. The first time a light was cast on the city itself in a widely mediatized and politicized manner in Lebanon was during the 1990s, when Solidere claimed Beirut and its heritage as central to rehabilitation of the nation. What followed were many critical voices that accepted that premise but redefined its corollaries, like what exactly counted as heritage and how it should be preserved. When the critical voices lost the battle for Solidere's Downtown they strategically retreated to its direct surrounding 19<sup>th</sup> century belt. Yet, with time, that concern took a back seat to other concerns of the day. It was only with the increasing speed of destruction of much of the heritage in that belt, when the second major real estate boom picked up speed (2005 onwards), that many people, including a young generation that had not participated in the earlier debates and confrontations, engaged with the issue again.

Thus, there were regular outpourings of outrage, sadness or nostalgia over a Beirut that was 'lost' or getting lost, because of callous developers, complicit or incompetent public representatives and people's ignorance. Occasionally such statements found their way into newspaper reports, when particularly prominent sites came under duress or simply when media provided (friendly) coverage of the activities of one of the NGOs. Most often however, they were part of a blog or post in social media. In the offline world, there were also numerous conferences or public meetings that were dedicated specifically to this issue, or which for one reason or the other have included sessions that were thus dedicated. The dominant trope that guided such meetings was that of (collective) memory and (national) identity. Thus, when a rally was held to stave off the immi-

ment closure and destruction of 'Beirut Theater' – one of the oldest theatre buildings in Beirut, known for the heroic (but ultimately ill-fated) attempts during the civil war to have 'the show go on', and which had been reopened in 2007 – an *Al-Akhbar* article headlined the event with a quote from one of the participants: "They are killing our memory" (2011-11-20, Zeinab Merhi). That quote is paradigmatic. The destruction of the identity of Lebanon (or Beirut specifically) is a frame that is frequently invoked, whether because buildings are seen as the deposit of collective memory and therefore identity (as above), or because the specific fabric and architectural forms that defined Beirut (and distinguished it from close cultural others, such as the Gulf countries) are being replaced by an 'ugly' and 'generic' new ('Gulf') aesthetic. Recurrently, though less frequently, people also made reference to what one may call a 'right to the city', in that the destruction of heritage also entails the displacement of either "Beirut's original inhabitants" or "Beirut's poor inhabitants" out of the city, as the new constructions are often unaffordable to the average Lebanese (cf. Chapter 2). With the speed of urban change, the recurrent occasions to lament a vanishing past and identity built up to an ever greater sense of urgency. It is therefore not surprising that even if most of the meetings and online posts were 'merely' plaintive in nature, some were meant to spring a public into action.

**'The Sanayeh Park Sit-In': public spaces, private deals** One such occasion where citizens were called up to stand up for the city occurred in the spring of 2009, a few months before the general elections in Lebanon. I received an email invite in full caps to a "sit-down" at Sanayeh Park to **"SAVE & PRESERVE OUR ONLY PUBLIC GARDENS"**: the "historical sites" Sanayeh and Sioufi. The forwarded email below explained the situation. It was written by an "urban architect and designer", Fadi Shayya (who would also go on to set up campaigns to open up to the public the other only park in Beirut, Horsh Beirut).

Dear Colleagues, Friends, and Concerned Citizens,

After the atrocious decision of the Municipality of Beirut to implement parking lots in Beirut under the historical Sanayeh Garden in Ras Beirut and the Sioufi Garden in Ashrafieh, every concerned citizen of Beirut is urged to object the strategies of the municipality and join the sit down in Sanayeh Garden at 10:00 AM this Saturday 30 May 2009.

The sit down is a civil action initiated by the Sanayeh neighborhood residents, which we hope it grows to encompass influential individuals, NGOs, and private sector enterprises. Please find attached the sit



down poster and invitation for your reference and to circulate as widely as possible.

I will be helping Mrs. Randa Zaiter (a Sanayeh resident and active mobilizer, copied herein) in coordinating this event; so, please contact me for any inquiries. I hope we can lobby as many stakeholders so we can advocate green areas, open spaces, public spaces, heritage, and most importantly citizenship in Beirut.

Best Regards,

Fadi Shayya

Urban Designer & Architect

It is clear that Chatterjee's spirit of civil society lives in this email: the "concerned citizens", who organize a "civil action", to set up a "lobby" by "stakeholders" who will not only "advocate" for the preservation of public goods but ultimately for "citizenship" itself. An attached poster showed a child-like drawing of the word "memories" (*dhikrayāt*), with a tree growing out of the letter "ya", the latter forming its root (see picture on page 216). It cleverly combines three themes important in this protest: heritage, the environment and (public/open) spaces for families and children. These themes also return in the online petition that was circulated around that same time and created by "Humanitarian Lobby":

Please sign the petition to stop Municipality of Beirut from building parking lots underneath the historical two gardens in Beirut: Sanayeh and Syoufi.

They will be obliged to cut off old trees whose roots are deep down and later they might handle the situation for worse after it's too late.

These are the only two gardens worth visiting for the habitants of Beirut, they are the only playgrounds for poor children to enjoy their time. Let's not allow them to commit this crime killing the green and the Oxygen in our lovely [sic] city.

Please sign the petition.<sup>157</sup>

On the poster, in the meanwhile, underneath the word "memories", the phrase "will be erased" indicated that the time was now to protect them. Therefore, the poster called on interested parties to support the people and friends of Sanayeh (*ahali wa muhibbi al-hadiqa*) by attending the

157 1,475 of the target 2,000 people had done so by the closing date of the petition, a seemingly random date in November, half a year later. [http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-sanayeh-and-syoufi-gardens-in-beirut/\(2014-08-11\)](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-sanayeh-and-syoufi-gardens-in-beirut/(2014-08-11))

The flyer attached to the call for a sit-in at Sanayeh park. "Memories will be erased".



manifestation, in which they would made their complaint “public”. An attached flyer, headed by the same artwork, explained the history of the park (which goes back to the Ottomans) and the significance of its various parts; it described the plans announced by the president of the municipal council, Abed al-Munim Aris, to construct parking lots under the courts and parks of the city; and finally listed the objections to these plans, as far as they concern the park: will the trees, whose history goes back “hundreds of years”, survive transplant? Where will the children play safely? How much new traffic and pollution will this cause? Moreover, have the residents surrounding the park not paid double the amount to live with a view and in a quiet and peaceful area? It ends with the final declaration:

We will not accept the establishment of state projects that benefit personal, electoral or promotional interests. As concerns environmental sources, we propose to continue the preservation of the public sparks. [We should] even create more of them, and establish parking lots under those new ones, instead of squandering the old, and rely on other plans and decrees as well, such as projects underneath main roads.

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The day of demonstration, though, surprisingly few people had turned up. The reason for the low turnout (some 30 people in all) was, as those present soon found out, that at the last moment, the original organizers –

who appear to be the inhabitants on the “Sanayeh area” – had cancelled the manifestation, because they had received a personal guarantee by PM Saad Hariri that the park would not be razed<sup>158</sup>. The narrative people cob- bled together was the following: there had been no change of plans on the municipal level, no plenary session, no public input or open forum for dis- cussion. Instead, some of the organizers had managed to obtain a personal meeting with Hariri and Aris and the latter two had made a commitment that looked to many people present a lot like an election promise – a PR play or possibly in return for some form of support. (This story line was strengthened by rumours that the original decree still lingered in some drawer waiting for the light of a new day.) Hanane Hajj Ali, the actress who in Chapter 4 had deplored the high-rise construction around the Sanayeh park as well as the state of the Lebanese state (and who, incidentally, had been among those who heroically tried to keep the Beirut Theatre open dur- ing the civil war), was also present. She remained suspicious. If there were no official documents, then it was just a verbal promise made to others. The suspicion voiced by Hajj Ali at the manifestation did show a social rift in the people drawn to the cause – a rift between the residents around the park and the (‘hard-core’ ) civil society activists. The first ones had direct personal stakes in the matter (residential satisfaction, real-estate value), whereas the latter were there primarily for the ‘public’ cause (the value of public green spaces). Whereas the first group was able to ‘solve’ the problem in the end through their connections, the latter had drawn on their connections in the media and NGOs in order to create public pres- sure. (That the residents would possess high connections is not entirely surprising, given the “super deluxe” residential towers built around the park, one of which also includes a high-profile member of the security establishment who apparently had been able to establish a photography ban in the park [which itself caused something of a melee with the park’s security guards, during the event]. The irony of the “concern” for green spaces and heritage by these people, by the way, was not lost on some of the attendees, who did not fail to point out the fact their residences were built where heritage architecture once graced the area.) Significantly though, the first group of people resorted to “civil society” first, drawing on their connections there. Thus Fadi Shayya enters the picture, who in turn established the “civil society” credentials of one of the residents by introducing her as an “active mobilizer”.

158 Of course, the story as presented in The Daily Star (2009-06-02, Mahdawi) by Mr. Aris himself the following day was quite different. It ran along the line of “we heard the people and we won’t proceed. We were actually on the people’s side the entire time.”

Most likely, then, the residents had engaged both approaches, both out of strategic considerations and out of a genuine dismay at the idea of razing a historic green space. If we compare that to Chatterjee's image of civil society in the post-colony, then we see a contrast between, on the one hand, the enfranchised nature of the Beirut's middle and upper-middle class members, 'culturally equipped' (Chatterjee 2002: 63) to have their 'voice' heard in the public sphere; their attempts at exerting pressure on policy-makers through a real demonstration and the use of the media, like proper members of Chatterjee's civil society; and on the other, the 'dyadic' (cf. Johnson 1986) agreement some of them were able to obtain, not like proper members of said civil society. Connection or intercession constitute the logic of such agreements, rather than rights and advocacy. I discuss the implication of the tensions between these two approaches at the end of this section; let me first 'thicken' the ethnography with two further cases.

### **'Save Beirut Heritage': youth activism and establishment networks**

The move to short-cut the civil process by reaching out to influential helping hands appears to be a more generally seductive prospect. While in the preceding example one could argue that the core of the "concerned citizens" would have stuck to civil procedures for political impact, in the following example I show that the core is as much part of the 'political' world as "self-interested" citizens would be. The example is the "Facebook group" (that's a self-description) Save Beirut Heritage. The group itself was started in the Spring of 2010 and quickly grew to about 6,000 members (it has grown over the years to some 13,000<sup>159</sup>). The group however was not merely intended as an on-line community of sympathizers or empathizers, but as an instrument in raising awareness that found its corollary in offline activities. The trajectory of these activities should be illuminating about the power of 'civil society' and the lure of 'political society'.

The conversion narrative of one of the three founding members (and at the time of research the only three permanent and active members), Nadine, was quite eloquent about the trajectory of heritage as an issue of civil concern to which I hinted above. Five years ago "there was little consciousness", she told me, but now young people are getting "interested", in part still because of "the Solidere thing". "I mean I don't want to go political, but most people who know something about anything, they know that Solidere, Solidere was a crime basically" having expropriated land without any recourse to an appeal. And they completely changed the

area. “Everyone says it was a very lively place, a place of diversity. Now it is not a place of diversity, now it’s like it belongs to only 5% or even 2% of the Lebanese population, most of the owners are actually not Lebanese, so the whole social change is more frightening”. (Interview July 2010)

The emphasis on “social change”, while dominant in the narrative about what has happened to Lebanon since the war, is a relatively minor strand of the heritage discourse more strictly speaking. It gained more currency with the latest real-estate boom, as displacement from Beirut became an inevitable consequence for many a family bought out of an older building slated for demolition. (The compensation sum people receive most often cannot afford a new place within the city.) Thus, she talks about the Mazraa neighbourhood, where her grandmother used to live. Nadine also picks up on this aspect as what defines her own approach, and perhaps, what defines a new generation in how it deals with this “old issue”.

This used to be a very traditional area, [but] when all these building are torn down, people are leaving and being replaced by people from different – let’s be real, the apartments that are being built are not for everyone, they’re luxury apartments. And the real inhabitants, they’re going and sadly, the Christians are going to Christian area and the Muslims are going to Muslim areas and Beirut is losing its diversity. So this is really, we’re building ghetto’s, this is the real problem.

This narration of what has been happening in Mazraa appears to be her personal conversion narrative more strictly speaking – this is when she noticed something wrong was happening and to this experience she stays true: it is not the buildings themselves so much as it is their inhabitants that are at stake.<sup>160</sup> In terms of the heritage discourse we’ve seen of the Zoqaq al-Blat initiative in the previous chapter, then, there is therefore a subtle (generational) shift from issues national or local identity, which buildings express, to social justice (where class is the ground for concern, even if it is still primarily cast in terms of confessional identities). The subtle shift coincides with her positioning of the group within the heritage (and more broadly, the civil society) scene. She profiled the group emphatically as a youth group – with a different, youthful, ethos. For them it’s about *doing* something, rather than being complacent. The “war gen-

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160 Not unlike Yazigi and Barakat, for whom touristic routes and buildings expropriated for public utility meant reconstitution of the national fabric, or the Sanayeh protestors, for whom standing up for public spaces meant standing up for citizenship. For Nadine, it’s not about old buildings per se, but about the diversity that gets lost with them.

eration", they complain about things, but they have no faith in change, in standing up for what they believe in. They've been beaten down. Not so for this new generation. Hence, it's not so much their issue that is new, but the way they want to tackle it is. They are inspired by more "activist" approaches, with activities like setting up a community centre, taking "direct actions" like sit-ins, perhaps even more radical options, like squatting a building or "sabotage". Other tactics she considered distinctive was their use of social media (they were a "Facebook group", after all) and focus on making "it" (the cause, the documentation) public.

Initially, about a month after starting the Facebook page, they used their page to call for an open meeting: a brainstorm session to come up with strategies to claim attention. Some of these more radical options also came up during that meeting. However, after a few months and a few more meetings and not a whole lot of action (direct or otherwise), the only strategy seeming worthwhile to them was to hook up to a politician's 'platform' and influence. They had already entered into an alliance with the venerable heritage association APSAD (the 'old generation'), which they primarily used for its documentation and policy proposals (information to get out in public) – the best of two civil worlds. Mostly likely through that association, and in particular by striking up relations with the notable and still influential Sursock family, whose matriarch heads APSAD, and having gained a certain measure of online notoriety, they were invited to join a special policy club convened by the Ministers of Interior (Baroud) and of Culture (Warde) which included APSAD, another Facebook group called "They are destroying national heritage", Yazigi's MAJAL (for initial sessions only) and Phillip Skaff, scion of a notable family and the then president of the Green Party<sup>161</sup>. These relations then also enabled them and convinced them of the necessity to ally themselves officially with the Green Party. Skaff would be able to take them places brainstorm sessions never could. Among other implications, though, that alliance meant other more 'radical direct actions' were now off the table. Having failed to mobilize the larger masses, they had instead opted for high-level connections as entry points into the policy-making process. Dyadic connections were reinserted into this "modern" young "Facebook movement".

**'Zoqaq Reborn': Revisiting the advocacy for Zoqaq al-Blat's patrimonial future** The last example of the complications in building a

<sup>161</sup> The party had recently made a few moves in the direction of the heritage cause, most likely not unrelated to Skaff's bid to clean up the Beirut River and redevelop part of it as a waterfront district.

civil society in Lebanon is the Zoqaq al-Blat project. While the amount of activities the project was able to organize was impressive, the results were less so. One of their practical objectives had been for the municipality to expropriate two buildings for the “public benefit”, a legal ground that provided the municipality with that competency. One building was a once splendid, though now somewhat dilapidated, mansion that once belonged to the poet Bechara al-Khoury. The other was a small complex that was once an Ottoman police station, then served as quarters for government employees, among whom the father of the singer Fairouz. The intention was to renovate these premises into a museum dedicated to the life and works of the Lebanese icon. However, as news of these plans leaked, the owner of the building precipitated the destruction of his ‘heritage’ property. In doing so, he undoubtedly hoped to stave off any expropriation plans and retain the possibility of selling the land at booming real-estate rates. (He also caused the organizers quite some headache as he kept interfering with the guided tours in front of the premises, successfully removing the stop from the tour.) Yazigi and others thus needed strong government support to overcome such resistance.

However, not long after the end of the project, a new municipal government was elected and the advances they seemed to have made with the previous incumbents were lost with the new mayor. Before, they had had at least two members of the municipal council that had taken up the issue of heritage and sustainable urban planning and who might have given it some momentum. But after the changing of the guard, it turned out that all the agreements that had been reached, the decisions that had been taken, the cooperation with the Paris municipality that had been initiated, had all been at the status of “*compte rendu*” – a status that meant the new council was in no way legally bound to observe these decisions. Moreover, it was difficult to get inroads into the new municipal council, which had been thoroughly repopulated. In a meeting, the new mayor made them perfectly clear that his order of business was *parking lots and accessibility* (I’m quoting Yazigi’s account of their meeting here). Whatever money remained could be used for designated heritage projects. The mayor had scheduled a meeting in which MAJAL, together with the (new) Organisation pour le Patrimoine, would present their vision and explain how one couldn’t disconnect parking lots from heritage, but it was cancelled *without a rain check* (informal interview July 2010).

Yazigi had hoped earlier that they would at least be able to show what was possible if people from the neighbourhood would get together, that “synergy” is possible, but in terms of impact on the policy process he was a bit despondent, a few weeks after the final event. Fearing the pros-

pect of having to work another two years to get people in the council to recognize the importance of their concerns, he mused they would have to change tactics if they were to have an impact. Of course, it could be possible that the new mayor only needed a little nudge, maybe he was just indifferent (though he might also obstruct their work actively). But a while later during our conversation, it seemed his final interpretation of the turn of events settled on a more political one: that the (new) municipal council is only there to execute a certain political mission, to work on the behest of the various political parties, all for sake of the balance of power – the ‘division of the spoils’ – rather than political parties choosing the competent people who are they to execute on a certain policy. The same went for the mayor – he acted directly under the authority of (Saad) Hariri. However, perhaps that was the single shimmer of hope. Hariri was still a young man, he might (still) be quite benevolent, open to this topic. (Here, Yazigi goes against the common consensus in civil society that tends to equate Rafiq Hariri and his son Saad as the uncultured twin-headed monster from the hell that is establishment politics.) If he were to have influence over the council, he would have to get to Hariri. The problem now was how to get to that higher political level. This was a different kind of lobby than the public, mediatized kind of lobby that Yazigi had advocated. As a mere head of an academic institute, he was not versed in this other kind. We discussed various possibilities, including talking to the Saving Beirut Heritage people who, by that time, had managed to get into a meeting with the Minister for Culture (and, as we’ve seen, fallen in with the graces of the once mighty and still reputable Sursock family). A different route would be to join the board of the Organisation pour le Patrimoine, which included former Beirut council member Ralph Eid and Philip Skaff. While all of them outsiders to the core of the political scene, they were one step closer. In other words, achieving sustainable urban regeneration had become a play of political relations and moves, rather than a project of addressing the state *per se*, as with the lobby ‘from the bottom-up’.

**Civil politics** If we compare these cases to Chatterjee’s schematics, then quite a bit of ‘political society’ seems to go into ‘civil society’. All point to rationalities that are publically disavowed in ‘civil society’: signs of ‘politics’ that are even contradictory to the self-understanding cultivated in public. Negotiations instead of accountability, backroom instead of public deliberations, tailored solutions instead of standard procedures. These should not be too surprising – the disavowal of politics is ‘weird’ in the sense that arguably ‘politics’ is what all social change needs, also in



Lebanon. Also, given that these dyadic arrangements are a social fact in Lebanon, the prospect and the practices are there for people to fall back on. Yet this quick comparison with characteristics of Chatterjee's political society doesn't *quite* hold. This has to do with the kind of analysis of post-colonial society and politics Chatterjee gives. His level of analysis is in fact uniquely on the basis of whole groups and sectors. He does not deal much with individual negotiations with individual bureaucrats, as others (such as Berenschot 2011; Gupta 1995; Hansen 2001; Tarlo 2003) do. Instead his cases are drawn from policy negotiation – through the mediation of local strongmen – on behalf of entire groups (such as slum residents). This kind of mediation – of groups and state through middlemen – is precisely not 'dyadic', in Johnson's (1986) sense, i.e. the 'personal' relation between the provider and the supplicant. In civil society, activists seek this kind of connection (even if they do it in the name of larger causes and thus potential beneficiaries; but these are not party to the exchange). This 'meso' level of analysis is not problematic as such, but it shouldn't stand in for the micro, as it tends to do in Chatterjee's image of things. We'll see how this tension between the levels of analysis plays out with his understanding of political society, but here we note that descending from an bird's eye perspective of civil society (the 'citizens' who 'advocate' for 'shared interests') reveals a greater complexity of actions and rationales that characterizations in most scholarship of post-colonial citizenship would imply or allow. Perhaps this oversight is part of larger pattern – scholars like Chatterjee, Singerman, or Holston all focus on the 'alternative' form of citizenship and how it can complicate our understanding of citizenship or politics. Empirically and conceptually, they rather neglect its 'standard' counterpart. In the process they leave the 'demographies' and concepts that are representative for our uncomplicated understanding of proper citizenship or politics unexamined and self-evident. The preceding case-studies indicate that that may be unwarranted. Towards the end of the chapter, I propose a way how we could understand them differently. Before doing so, however, it's necessary to get a better comparative sense of its counterpart.

**Ideology and morality in Lebanon's 'political society'** Hence, we turn to the other side of Chatterjee's political divide, to 'political society'. As we saw in the introduction, one of the key characteristics of political society (or equivalent conceptualizations of marginalized citizenship) was that the logic of practice was one of strategic pursuit of self-interest. Chatterjee situates this kind of action in the following type of relations "between governments and populations" (2002: 51):

[It is] a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups. Many of these groups, organized into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. They may live in illegal squatter settlements, make illegal use of water or electricity facilities, travel without tickets in public transport. In dealing with them, the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits. (2002: 65)

Chatterjee qualifies the struggles of people who live on squatted lands to defend their presence and advocate for amenities through collective action (in concert with local big men and political parties or associations) as “political”, because they fall outside the “the terrain of established law or administrative procedure” (id.)<sup>162</sup>. Their politics is to claim the ‘right’ to live on the land on the basis of the *fait accompli* principle, acknowledging they have no legal claim to it. As one of the leaders that Chatterjee cites explains: “We have no other place to build our homes. We have collectively occupied this land for so many years. This is the basis for our claim to our own homes” (id.: 64) This is a politics largely devoid of ideology<sup>163</sup>. People in need of certain material resources – land, electricity, foodstuffs – and in danger of losing them, they enter into negotiation with (usually) the state in order to secure them.

Claims of necessity would also explain the shift in allegiance from one party to another. For instance, Chatterjee describes the case of a neighbourhood consisting of illegally squatted land adjoining the railway. The big men of the neighbourhood struck up alliances with the Communist Party in the 1960s, whose leaders then managed to prevent its eviction in the ‘70s. Since then, however, a neighbourhood association has been able to attract funds to build amenities like a child-care unit and a library, as well as to persuade the municipality to install water and public toilet facilities (even as the neighbourhood itself remains illegal). The clout the association now wields also results in authority in the neighbourhood. Similarly, with a new eviction proposal hanging over their heads, Chatterjee explains that squatters have shifted allegiance from the Left Front to the Trinamul Congress, because the latter’s leader might become railway minister and would therefore offer chance at protection. In the following, I will complicate the image of strategy and calculation.

162 Much like social theorists as diverse as Dewey and Rancière have located the political there where the procedural runs short.

163 Chatterjee hints at “legitimacy as providers of well-being” (id: 63), instead.

One complicating factor is the ideological sophistication and commitments by individuals tied to the 'client-based' structure. I discuss two kinds of examples. One is the belief in proper procedures that is clearly a domain of civil society, as we have seen in chapter 5 ('civil society' members weren't interested in politics per se, merely that it takes place in a clean and orderly manner). Proper procedures are also the basis for Chatterjee's distinction: the "political" space of where rules may be bent in opposition to the "high modern", civil space where rules are rules. However, the value of these procedures and norms that undergird them are not exclusive to civil society. The second example concerns the role one assigns oneself in the (moral and political) community. These roles, one's political calling or sense of morality, are in fact larger and richer than any necessity-based negotiation would 'require'. All in all then, these examples suggest subaltern society probably looks different from what you would expect it to, based on reading a Chatterjee or a Simone.

Before starting, I need to attend to one qualification. For my ethnographic discussion of 'political society' I return to Khandaq. In so far as we were able to situate Khandaq within the domain of Simone's 'anticipatory politics', so its universe does resemble the cases upon which Chatterjee formulated his conceptualization of political society. Still, Khandaq is not some massive slum. Granted, Chatterjee's demography of political society is wider than slum residents, including "[r]efugees, landless people, day labourers, homesteads, [those] below the poverty line" (id.: 65), but the question is warranted how comparable these cases are with Khandaq. In a sense, they are so only in a limited manner. This is because Chatterjee treats political society essentially as the relations of groups and state. In the block quotation above he defined it at the outset as growing out of government "policies targets at specific population groups". The only case I have shown that corresponds to that was the eviction of the refugees from the old Christian neighbourhood. They were indeed treated as a group, through the mediation of political powers 'on the ground'. All other cases present day-to-day interactions of individuals with various government apparatuses – especially the security establishment. However, these cases are still relevant, for a number of reasons. One is that they often concern (small) infractions of the law (petty criminality, drug use, disturbance of the peace) or the uncertain legal ground a minority of the Khandaq population stands on (those in who live in squats). A second is the mediation by various kinds of big men between citizen, state and party, while a third, related element is that people tend to be locked into political and electoral machines. For example, Abu Zalem would certainly qualify for a casting as one of those communal leaders

that Chatterjee postulates as the nodal point in many of the “associations” in governmentally marginal areas. The issue of comparison, therefore, is not primarily of comparable situations, but one of comparable levels of analysis. I come back to this issue at the end of the section.

**Proper procedures and the public good** As we’ve seen, the ‘proper procedures’ cherished by civil society folks may not always be followed in civil society (either), but to a certain extent the *ideals* are shared with inhabitants of Khandaq, even if the vocabulary to talk about them differs. Such differences are significant in what they say about each world, but they do not negate the convergences. Let me offer you a glimpse of both differences and convergences, by diving into a discussion of one of Abu Zalem’s pet peeves at the time: drugs.

Drugs were an issue that preoccupied people in Khandaq. There had been some cases of youth in the neighbourhood that had fallen prey to more hardcore drugs, and it could well be that the incidence of petty criminality and youth delinquency were related to drug use. Given that Abu Zalem had abrogated the – mostly accepted – authority to maintain the social order, drugs became a likely area of intervention. His preoccupation was not only of a practical kind though; it also had strong ideological resonances. Those resonances did not derive in the first place from being part of a religiously pious political movement (i.e., Hizbullah), because while he accepted and conformed to it, it wasn’t his naturalized habitus, having come from and been trained within a *secular* party-militia. More likely it was tied to a more generally shared perspective that associated drugs with social and moral degeneracy (with the collapse of social and moral ties in the community, especially family ties), even though Abu Zalem gave his own spin on the matter. In his formulation, drugs are bad because they weaken youth who would otherwise stand strong to fight. It is therefore unavoidably clear that drugs are part of geopolitical play, or as Abu Zalem phrased it, “there are embassies behind it”. You see,

the man who carries a weapon is 18, 19, 20, 25. When he takes drugs, he can no longer fight. So if in all the region there are 100 who take drugs, that’s 100 who will no longer fight. Who would be behind this project? Israel? It’s like with the English in Egypt and China with opium. A society on drugs is a society asleep. It doesn’t stand up to fight. (Interview March 2011)

Trying to counter that is a sheer impossible task, he admitted. He had tried to seek help and alliances, but found the proverbial closed door

everywhere he went. He had gone to “the Party” (Hizbullah – the Party of God – though he didn’t specify to whom precisely within the party), but they kindly requested him to deal with it himself. He had gone to the state – to the intelligence service and to the police (both regular and military). It seems he did this largely through his own network, officers he knew from his war days or from more current contacts in the security establishment. However, the officers also couldn’t assist him. Yet it’s not that they do not recognize or understand the problem. As he complained to some of his guys and a few visitors, after Najah Wakim’s visit (mentioned in the previous chapter):

Are you telling me that the Drug Enforcement Office doesn’t know who’s selling? We’ve told them 10 times, there’s one in Hayy Sellom, at the bus stop, he’s distributing “Simo” (coughing syrup), pills, and – I mean, seriously [*shu `am tihki*]? 100% for sure! Now who is covering him? Who? To top it all, the existing parties, we are asking them to come together. Well, we’ll see. Nowadays, for instance, in Egypt and China, they let the people get addicted to opium. If you let this part of society get addicted to drugs, who will fight? It’s the drug addicts who will fight, when there are no more drugs they stop fighting. This is what they did in China and in Egypt. And look, when you’re the party on the ground, and you say to the state ‘you aren’t doing anything’, well look man, then your job as a party – Here, come and see [I tell them]! There’s 1, 2, 3 who are selling. But [they were like] ‘we can’t intervene as replacements for the state’. So: when you want to [as a party], you take the place of the state, when you don’t want to, you just blame the government.

So why, if the parties know what is going on, why are all sides involved trying to deflect blame and shift responsibility? For Abu Zalem the answer was relatively straight-forward when it came to the state, the security establishment and some of the political parties ill-disposed to the Resistance. They were either compromised or actively involved in the geo-political game of weakening Lebanon. “The problem is with the state, it supports drugs. [...] They’re closing their eyes. Someone’s [*fī shī*] telling them to leave the issue as it is. They want people hooked on [*yibli*] drugs.” Take the Lebanese Forces, Abu Zalem’s old enemy in the early days of the war and whose political talking heads were recurrent recipients of ire in Shia Khandaq. Addressing the question in the aforementioned entourage as to why the street can’t be mobilized anymore (like it used to), Abu Zalem asserted it comes down to the youth being ‘worked’ by the wrong forces. “That’s right, that’s right, it’s the Lebanese Forces! It’s the

Lebanese Forces towing the American line, who are distributing drugs, 2,000,000 pills. How else are they coming into the country?"

More difficult is the question why Hizbullah would also not tackle the issue head-on, seen as it lives by the strength of its combatant youth. Abu Zalem's explanation ran as follows:

Those who are selling drugs are Shia – the Party doesn't want to get make problems with the Shia of the Biqaa. They [Shia in the Biqaa] live off of it. The Party is telling the state – you guys, deal with it. And the state doesn't deal with it. The Party doesn't want to get into trouble – it would create a big problem. It's at war with Israel – they can't afford an internal problem because of drugs. (Interview March 2011)<sup>164</sup>

So he was left to his own devices. To his own admission, that's not much. His work was on the ground, talking to youngsters and weaning them off as well as maintain conversations with local big men (in other neighbourhoods), about trouble makers and encouraging them to keep focused on drug prevention. To this end, he organized walks with his loyal clique through various neighbourhoods for a while – until his clique proved not so loyal and started dragging its feet, literally. (The official reason for stopping given to me by one of the clique was that serious threats to peace, in the form of youth clashes, had been eliminated with the demilitarization of Sunni forces. Whatever differences existed between various parties could be cleared on higher levels.)

When Abu Zalem talked to his superiors and colleagues in "the Party", his impulse seemed to be to promote institutional decision and policy-making, bringing in ideas and suggestions, attending Party meetings. He thus treated his party as an organ, rather than a tit-for-tat type of network. This is quite similar to the ideal that animates those in civil society, namely to follow proper procedures for the public good. At the same time, it's not quite the same, because it seems obvious to Abu Zalem that, at least in this case (of geopolitical proportions), there is no role to assign for the state, to follow such procedures or implement policies thus conceived, because it is irrevocably compromised. In such a case, when you come at it from a perspective from within the confessional system, the captured state is not the target of intervention, but something to evade or work around. Still, the dynamic of his efforts to put the issue on the

164 For a better sense of the politics that Abu Zalem is talking about here, consult Harb & Deeb's 2012 deconstruction of the image of the southern suburbs under Hizbullah's 'complete control': <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero103012>.

agenda indicates the ideal of a structure through which political positions could be generated and incorporated in the policies it defends towards government and state institutions.

'Madani' preconceptions about the "popular sector" might blind one from recognizing that the aspirations of the popular sector may well not be so different from those in civil society. Holston, one of the authors who work with this dual postcolonial differentiation of citizenship, is actually able to capture these aspirational convergences, even if his conceptual work kind of falls out of step with that analysis. His dichotomy, coming out of his Brazil research, is that of 'entrenched' vs. 'insurgent' citizenship. In principle it is based on the same premise that Chatterjee works from: there are people who, while being recognized members of the political community, are actually quite marginal to the political and social establishment. Yet Holston's whole point is that 'the other kind' of citizenship is not one of a different kind of logic, but one that encroaches on and appropriates the form and substance of privileged citizenship. That makes it interesting to contrast with Chatterjee's model.

Holston's fieldwork over the many years has shown him people in (legally or politically) marginal situations progressively adopting the vocabulary (of rights) and the practices (law) of privileged citizenship in order to assert their presence. He recounts the example of a series of confrontations over time between residents of an irregular neighbourhood and the São Paulo courts. In the 1972, he witnessed how a court official was attacked when he announced residents their eviction had been ordered. They fought off the eviction, the only way they knew how – by physically resisting intrusions by officers of the law. As a resident told Holston: "at that time, it was a war, between us and the land-scammers. The law didn't exist. The only law was might; it was violence. We didn't know anything about rights. All we knew was to beat up the court official." Then 30 years later, in a "similar" neighbourhood, a similar court official came to visit a resident. But now an advocacy organization was located in the neighbourhood and had been telling residents to refer any such visitors to them. Thus this particular Treasury lawyer was brought in the office, where the head of the association asked him "to look for the law". (Holston 2008: 234) The law was thus invoked as the shared vocabulary to evaluate state action. Together they went through all the particularities of the case and the association was able to convince that the order had been based on faulty information or erroneous legal interpretation. The transformation of "belligerent reactions" by "residents of the poor urban periphery" into "the proactions [of] using rights strategically", to Holston, is the transformations of the marginalized into citizens.

The case is specifically Brazilian, especially with its discrepancy between formally inclusive law that recognizes all as citizens, and an otherwise highly unequal society that divests many people of the capacity of fully exercising their citizenship. This is one reason why the urban poor adopt a ‘rights discourse’. While that may not be so relevant for Lebanon<sup>165</sup>, that does not detract from the crux of the matter: Holston recognizes his subalterns’ desire to be full members of their political community (on the same premises as those who consider themselves part of civil society). For that reason, Holston is good to think with. It fits with Abu Zalem’s (and not only Abu Zalem’s) desire for proper procedures of governance, in the way of general accountability and the development of a policy platform, that we saw here. He may be less useful to think about the actual differences in ways that people pursue objectives. His insurgent citizenship does not differ substantively from entrenched citizenship. Insurgent citizens are people who have appropriated the rights and privileges previously reserved to individuals who had already been recognized as substantively full citizens in the extant “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière). It thus allows one to map out, for example, what happens in a process of democratization – the kinds of conflicts and contradictions of people seeking to gain or maintain social positions. However it does not fare so well in capturing the logic and language of citizenship for those who have not made successful insurgent claims (who depend on political mediation rather than rights, for example). In other words, it does not recognize there may be alternative vocabularies of political engagement. In the next section, I’d like to attend to such differences in ideological vocabulary and the imagination that they underpin.

**Finding one’s calling** In this section I therefore juxtapose stories from two residents of Khandaq – men enlisted in Abu Zalem’s little group – as well as from an employee of one of the NGOs I covered in the previous chapter. I compare the two sides here as a way of putting them on equal analytical footing as well as a way of bringing out more vividly what is distinctive for each. All three stories attempt to capture each individual’s political consciousness, trace it back to decisive moments that shaped it, to map out its defining values. The first two stories are of inhabitants (squatters) of the Khatib building discussed in Chapter 2. The infraction on the legal order this constitutes and the (perceived) cover for it by ‘the political parties’ situate them in this particular half-way integration into the political sphere that

165 Although with the advent of the ‘Arab Spring’, rights as a frame for discourse did make a more explicit appearance on the activist scene. See Coda.



Chatterjee described: an integration based on poor legal standing (citizenship), collective bargaining power and governmental pragmatics.

The first of these men is Subhi. I got to know him through a small group of younger corner boys who hailed me when I was making one of my first strolls through Khandaq, after having moved there. They were sitting in a make-shift patio that I later learned was the prerogative domain of a group of neighbours, friends and 'followers' of Abu Zalem. Subhi was one of them. (The corner boys meanwhile were tied to the place mostly through direct vicinage, though some were part of Abu Zalem's extended family – hence their use of the patio.) I've talked about Subhi in Chapter 2 and his long searches for appropriate and affordable quarters, finally – or rather, for the moment – finding a home in a Khatib apartment. After moving in to the Khatib squat, situated down the road from Abu Zalem's 'office', Subhi had become closer and closer to him over the years. As explained in the Chapter 4, the prime reason "the Party" contracted Abu Zalem's services was to recruit and train young men for the cause of the resistance. This is where Subhi (interviewed March 2012) also comes in.

The story began for him in his teens, when he started "walking", as the expression goes, with the other Shia party, Amal. Looking back, he didn't talk about it with much affection. It was just something you did, he explained, all his friends were in the party as well and he didn't really think about it that much. But even then, he wasn't quite happy with it. When we spoke, it was clear to him why not. "Amal doesn't take care of its boys. They won't ask you whether you're doing alright, or how things are at school or at work." This all started to become clear to him when he saw that the converse was possible too, during the "July War" in 2006, when Israel carried out a large-scale retaliation against Hizbullah for abducting a number of soldiers near the Lebanese border. At the time Subhi was living in the southern suburbs, which the Israeli army also bombed. He fled the suburbs to live with his wife's family, who was from the neighbourhood, along with a number of other refugee families. He got involved in the assistance to these families himself (for instance by delivering food packages) and he witnessed how the Party helped (literally, "served") the people. As he recalled with unequivocal conviction: "The level of organization shown by the Party then was something unseen in Lebanon – not during the civil war nor after." It was tightly organized. "When they needed people to move onto the streets, they moved onto the street. When they had to retreat, they retreated". To him (as, incidentally, to many others, both admirers and detractors), what characterizes the party is "nizām": order or organization. And it was clear that it was this characteristic that drew him closer to Amal's rival.

He also started drawing closer to Abu Zalem (himself one of the organizational nodes of refugee relief in 2006). Of course, he had known him before as well, but the contact didn't really amount to much more than the respectful but perfunctory 'hi and bye'. But now they starting talking more. In 2007 – Subhi had by then found a new apartment in the neighbourhood – he asked Abu Zalem to present his candidacy for party membership. The Party gave him a much more serious training than Amal had done. For one, it takes a long time to get your basic qualifications – and thus your military id. (It took Subhi at least a year, because in May 2008, when organized fighting broke out between government supporters and opposition parties, he couldn't be deployed yet.) Moreover, the basic qualifications are merely the beginning of a life-long learning process – once a year he goes to a *dawra* – a training session – and he goes to religious classes every week. That points to the second reason he felt his training was more substantial: the training wasn't merely military. Much more important was the political and religious education – especially the religious education. Through that education, he learned to behave better, develop better relations with others and, in general, to present to others an image of decency. Some of the components of this new comportment are pretty straightforward: like abstaining from alcohol and from fooling around with girls (as well as, one might add, abdicating (popular) music). But such comportment also includes paying respect to one's elders and to stop cursing and swearing. "It feels good," says Subhi, "people respect you for it". And when people respect you, they also come to you when they are troubled by something.

This is perhaps in part where Subhi sees his societal role, yet he didn't avow as much. He framed his engagement as "being ready" – ready if something happens. Such a something may be a small thing, such as an altercation between two hotheads in the neighbourhood (and indeed, Subhi was always alert and quick to intervene whenever, say, sounds of a fight emanated from the next street). Together, with Abu Zalem and others from the group, they also used to do the rounds of the mixed Sunni and Shia neighbourhoods in Beirut, to keep the conversation going with other strongmen, prevent and resolve conflicts between the youngsters. (After the events of May 2008 though, they had been absolved from that responsibility, which had been taken up higher in the party hierarchies, according to his explanation.) Yet, from the way he spoke about it, his primary reference point for his readiness seemed to be for 'big' military changes – the next war.

Subhi didn't specify which war that might be. One may think of a next Israeli intervention, or of civil war (though the only enemies Subhi and

most Shia identify in Lebanon are the Salafis. Popular perceptions of Hizbullah's – and by extension the Shia's – role in Lebanon corresponds well with Hizbullah's official discourse, which proclaims its weapons are only pointed towards Israel.). But (the possibility of) 'war' was infused into the everyday – at least as a symbol of the grandness of the dimensions of today's life in Lebanon. Take a second member of Abu Zalem's group, Bilal, also someone who slowly found his way into Hizbullah's fold. I came to talk to him about his trajectory in life right after he and a few other members of Abu Zalem's little clique had exchanged wartime stories and military credentials with a relatively new visitor to the nightly tea talks that Abu Zalem hosted. The war stories gave us the entry point into our conversation, after the others had left.

*We know what war is*, he started out saying.

*May 2008, for example, was no war. In 2 hours it was over and afterwards [in the ensuing two days] nothing serious happened anymore. The young guys on the street might think that was war and may even be excited for more – they think it is cool to carry a gun. But it wasn't real fighting.*

Still, the event did remind him of the civil war (he is from '69) and made him realize that the country is going backwards. It was an important factor in his motivation to join Abu Zalem. He had been relatively close to Abu Zalem since about 2004 and the latter had already extended an invitation to join, but he hadn't made any decision. He could have withdrawn still. But in 2008, he felt it was either yes or no.

2008 taught him that war was possible, that war is chaos and that in chaos, the "zo`rān" take over<sup>166</sup>. Zo`rān is a word that can variously denote those who live outside the law, criminals, those who disturb the social peace and have no respect or honour. It can refer to corner boys who are losing their way or it can refer to real thugs. In Bilal's story, it's the opposition to zo`rān that structures his self-narration. Thus, before Abu Zalem sought him out, and perhaps because of that, he led a quiet and withdrawn life, "staying away from those who cause trouble [zo`rān]". Abu Zalem motivated his invitation to come and "sit with him" by the appeal to protect the neighbourhood from zo`rān. And in 2008, it all became bigger and more real. It's the zo`rān who seek war, because in war they can do what they want. But he must protect and defend his family, and that's

166 The opposition of order vs. chaos, and party/state vs. troublemakers is a more broadly shared theme. See also the quote in fn. nr. 90 by mukhtar Baydoun's assistant, about the nature of militias, in Chapter 4.

why he decided in 2008 that he must do what he can to prevent war. As he explained to me then, those are also the ideals of the Resistance: to protect yourself and your family, and to walk the straight path.

Today, he declared wearily, it's worse than it was in 2008. Today he sees a different kind of war. It's a war about money, for the economy. The state in fact is at war with its own people. The people impoverish and at some point it will lose control (and explode into war). "The problem is that all those in government are the same as those who were at war with each other. The very same people. And they are all thieves (*haramiya*)". Until these war criminals leave and people replace them with others who work for them, it won't get any better. "By the way," Bilal added, "if it weren't for the Sayyed [Hasan Nasrallah], it would have been war a long time ago". When I interjected that Hizbullah is a party in government now too, he retorted: "Yes, they are part of the government, but they have stayed the same".

Before moving on to a discussion of these two portraits, I introduce the third portrait, drawn from 'civil society'. Nayla works for LADE, which was, as we've seen, a crucial player in the association of different "NGOs" that set up the 1998 *Baladi, Baldati, Baladiyati* campaign (My country, My locality, My municipalities<sup>167</sup>) for the resumption of municipal elections. Nayla was one of those who considered that campaign as one the first big victories "for civil society". However at the time she was not involved in the campaign herself. In fact, she hadn't even heard of LADE, though she had been aware of the Baladiyati campaign. Instead she was in college and getting involved in college politics. During her first year at the (public) Lebanese University, she joined up with the Free Patriotic Movement, the (nominally reformist) party headed by General Aoun, one of the major Christian (Maronite) politicians and a self-declared contender for president. At the time however, Aoun was still in an exile to France imposed by Syria, and the FPM was more a movement than a party. Nayla was in the process of being nominated candidate as an FPM student representative when she had her *first clash with the political parties*. The clash occurred over a national proposal to re-unite the different campuses of the Lebanese University that had all been created when the war made crossing over into the 'other's' territory nearly impossible. It was a major topic among students at the time. But the FPM and the other major Christian party, the Lebanese Forces, voted against it, in Nayla's interpretation, because *they represented the position many Christians take, namely*

*that they are superior to others in the region. They were afraid of mixing with the inferior Muslims would degrade the quality of education and perhaps degrade the Christians in general.* This was a disappointment for her, as she had not expected the FPM to display such 'confessionalism'. Already then, secularism was a central value for her and her main hope for the country. So she left the party.

She had two more jabs at politics in the following years. Once, in the final year of college, together with some colleagues she tried to build an alternative, secular political platform as candidate for the student representative body. It didn't work out. Students voted for their respective 'confessional' parties (just as they had also been in favour of maintaining the 'Christian' campus). The university is in fact, she maintains, one the most important battlegrounds for a democratic Lebanon. The university is the place *where students learn how the confessional and clientelistic voting system works in Lebanon* and to find their place in it. Everything that happens outside of the university, happens inside as well: vote buying, pressure and even harassment (into the very voting booth).

Her second involvement with politics and the party system was when she joined one of the oppositional and secular parties on the left, led by a charismatic former member of the once strong Communist Party and someone who voices one of the most biting critiques of political corruption and the woes of confessional politics in the country. The young members of the party were engaged and committed and they talked in extenso about the major political issues of the day. But she also soon realized that the party leader *took to his own counsel* and that the advice the young members formulated seldom seemed to find their way upward in the party hierarchy. For this lack of internal democracy, she decided to leave the party. She hasn't tried any other parties since, because she knew *what they would require of me to join*.

Instead she found her way into civil society when she heard about Greenline, an environmental association set up not long after the end of the civil war (and can thus boast one of more the distinguished pedigrees of civil society advocacy in Lebanon). She had had an interest in environmental issues for some time already – coming from the village, she explained, she felt forest preservation to be especially important – and she had checked out Greenpeace before coming into contact with Greenline. However, Greenpeace didn't work on the forest issue important to her (their most important project at the time concerned nuclear power) and, perhaps in retrospective, was also put off by the fact they hardly worked on local projects. This is where Greenline distinguished itself. They were organized at the local level, really working with people, for example

on public transportation, but also on Lebanon's forests. She called in to become a volunteer.

However, she soon felt out of place among a crowd made up primarily of (agricultural) engineers. She then heard about LADE on TV. She asked Greenline for a phone number (the two organizations have collaborated on a number of projects and at one point occupied the same building, a hotspot for alternative advocacy in Beirut, called 'Zico's House'). At LADE, she started out as a volunteer, then a media monitor (checking for incendiary language during election time) and slowly made her way up to leading positions. At the time, her most important project was the Committee for Electoral Reform, which aims to change the system of national elections (one of the most important components of which is proportional representation). One of the reasons why Nayla feels it is such an important project is that it extends beyond various actors (much like the Baladiyati program). They've reached out to the professional syndicates (two of which are part of the committee) and to universities, and they also engaged public intellectuals (like university professors). It's more difficult to reach consensus, but when they do – mostly on a per-issue basis – they have much more mobilizing power than if they were just a bunch of NGOs. They could yet have a real bearing on the political decision-making process.

**Popular ideology, civil politics and political subjectivity** We can identify at least three themes in these presentations of one's political engagement: the sect, political parties and the central, organizing value that underlies the framing of these first two. Whereas for Nayla that was democratization, for Subhi and Bilal order structured their ideas (get it?). The themes, in the meanwhile, have come up repeatedly throughout the past chapter and they certainly inform "civil society" discourse in Lebanon. The same holds for Subhi's and Bilal's stories: the themes we can identify come back in various constellations in the conversations I've had with other Khandaq residents as well. However, given Subhi's and Bilal's training in a political party, they may have been able to formulate these ideas, as well as what they mean for who they are, in a more eloquent and coherent fashion.

Let's start our little exegesis with the discursive framing of the sect. For Nayla and others in "civil society", secularism is a prime commitment. Secularism here is understood primarily from within a political frame – while she obviously condemns people making value judgements about others on the basis of faith (Christians as superior to Muslims), sectarianism primarily means the need to take religion out of the game of politics, to prevent politicians from vesting their interest in the structure of the

religious community. For Subhi and Bilal, however, the community is a social and cultural reality that needs to be defended against attacks. Such attacks are thought to come from outside Lebanon, primarily, though it can also be an affair between communities. Secularism as political ideology simply doesn't play a role in their vocabulary.

The positions that parties take up in their perspectives varies accordingly. Nayla sees political parties primarily as an obstacle to reform, an obstacle to realizing her dreams for a better Lebanon. This is simply because most of them exist by virtue of the sectarian political system and thus are inclined to continue depending on it. In so far as political parties are outside of the confessional system – the 'secular' parties – they are dysfunctional. She recognizes their necessity however, as the organs through which, not merely in spite of which, change must be achieved. Dissatisfied with the existing parties, she has in fact contemplated starting a party of her own at several moments (but decided it wasn't feasible). That idea is directly tied to her commitment to democratization though: it would be a different party for a different Lebanon, an (internally) democratic party for a democratically organized Lebanon. Leadership here is never top-down but always vetted bottom-up.

Subhi and Bilal take up a more ambivalent position that is akin to many a party member or supporter – one's own party is good, but the other man's party causes trouble. Bilal is specific in his accusation of certain parties – they are led by war criminals who have no interest in serving the country. This is what marks out Hizbullah for both men – it is led by an honest and prudent man who is there to serve the people. (And incidentally, it is in this aspect where Amal falls short, for Subhi.) It is clear in any case that being part of a party is central to their imagination of being helpful to their community and society and in potential at least, the political party is a guarantor of safety. This brings us to the last point. For Subhi and Bilal the party is a central tenet in their more encompassing belief in order. What Lebanon lacks is efficacious organization and rules that effectively keep (powerful) people in line. Incidentally, (strong) leadership is an important element of this, although again, they recognize that it is a double-edged sword with many leaders deceiving and dividing their people.

There are two points I want to raise. One is about similarities: clearly Khandaq is a place where people entertain and develop real political ideologies, just as people do through 'civil society'. The second is about differences: clearly these ideologies are not the same. How should we understand the similarities and the differences, respectively? I address the first point now; the second point follows after a few pages. To rephrase the

first point: not only are these ideas underdetermined by any calculation of needs and interests between subject and ruler, but they are real ideals and personal values they are trying to live up to. These ideals represent what it means for them to be a member of Lebanese society today. Now, as mentioned previously, Subhi and Bilal are exceptions in Khandaq to a certain extent. Yet that does not detract from the argument itself because, firstly and fundamentally, beyond their specific discourse, the values proclaimed by 'the people' (throughout this thesis) do also pertain to a moral vision of society and politics (whether that concerns the proper way of deciding all things public or fulfilling one's personal role). They should be treated accordingly. Secondly and more operationally, cases like Subhi's and Bilal's show the problem of assuming something like 'political society' in the first place. Parties like Hizbullah that educate their members are to be found everywhere, including, as we've seen, along the railroad in southern Calcutta. In other words, Khandaq might not seem your ideal typical case of political society (i.e., a socio-political space where politics revolves around the strategic mediation of group resources), but then you'd have to wonder if there is such a thing at all.

In part the problem is logical in nature. Chatterjee defines political society as politics for "most of the world" who are not, in practical fact, full citizens, and so they don't invoke the high-minded principles on which full citizenship is based – they do something else to get by or ahead. They engage the polity around them through need-based, mediation-enabled negotiations. While that is not incorrect, the definition of the problem precludes a second look. It is also a methodological issue, however. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, one thing that distinguishes Chatterjee's analysis and theorizing is that he discusses the political encounter in "political society" uniquely on the level of groups. If he would have descended further down to the level of individuals and the conversations and daily projects that make up their lifeworlds, perhaps he would have noticed his account of political society is somewhat poor. Again, not that I dispute the nature of the basic dynamic he outlines. There are however two dangers: one, if one lets the group level stand in for the micro, you probably won't do justice to 'political society' as a society where people live. Second, you might actually misunderstand fundamental modes of operations – for example when it comes to alliances people make with mediatory forces: they help them make a stand in exchange for loyalty. To take Subhi's example, he did not shift from Amal to Hizbullah because the latter was better at addressing his needs, but because it lived up to his ideals. Subhi will not be alone in this (nor are railway squatters). In short, Chatterjee is unable to do justice to these lived ideals.



Chatterjee is merely exemplary in this and henceforth I shall refrain from picking on him. In this broader literature more widely, quite often the subalterns and their brethren and sistren across the world do not appear as people with a full political subjectivity. A unsympathetic reading of Scott's work on the "weak" would subsume him under this kind of literature, given that the lack of political consciousness (ideology) is the premise of his entire argument. However, the work of a different scholar strongly influenced by Scott might make the limits of this kind of analysis more apparent: Singerman's (1995) meticulously researched and painstakingly argued study of the kind of political participation open to the "popular sector" in 1980s Cairo. Her work is actually more instructive than Scott's because while the argument adheres in part to Scott's logic, it is not as bound up with the specific argument Scott himself wanted to make. Furthermore, her research field stays within a moral universe – that of the popular neighbourhood – quite akin to Khandaq's, even if the political context is quite different. This political context – authoritarian rule, under a younger Mubarak – is precisely Singerman's starting point. She points out that standard political science (she cites Myron Wiener as its representative) tends to focus on the formal political sphere as its object of study. In doing so, it fails to understand much of anything in these authoritarian situations, because most people are excluded from that formal sphere. But that doesn't mean that they have no impact on the political process. Or at least, that is her meticulous and painstaking argument. They do have an impact and they have one through "*informal* avenues of [political] participation". These avenues of participation are built upon the "alternative, informal political institutions" they form "to further their interests" in the shadows of state governance (1995: 3), out in the rather messy inner-city neighbourhoods or outside of the city in the "auto-constructed", irregular satellite cities. Such 'institutions' are constituted by networks that are deployed to make financial ends meet (like short term savings schemes), to get a position or favour through a local politician or bureaucrat, or services from a social charity. The norms that people take as points of orientation, and have to take as points of orientation in order to be judged favourably in the interactions and exchanges within these networks, derive from a 'family ethos' – a set of norms based on analogies to kinship – and from orthodox Islam (though she doesn't emphasize this aspect). In her discussion of these exchanges however, Singerman, much like Scott, emphasizes the dimension of "self-interest" over norms – these exchanges are resources people need to make those ends meet.

The crux in Singerman's analysis – a Scottean type of move – is that these institutions, networks and practices cumulatively change the order of

things in the polity, constituting a challenge to politicians and state-builders who need to respond to these faits accomplis. Scott analyzed goings-on in the Vietnamese rice patties in a similar fashion: one peasant stealing rice from the master doesn't do much to impact the operation of the system, but when a lot of peasants start doing it, it becomes a weapon of the weak, necessitating change in the system. Such cumulative impact is in the final analysis what it means for the people from the "popular sector" (the *sha`b*) to be "political", in Singerman's eyes. This does not leave a lot of scope for political consciousness or ideology, for thinking about what kind of citizen one is. Singerman talks about something like ideology in two respects. Firstly, in respect to the official ("formal") political sphere, in so far as people have some opportunity to interact with it, and participate in it directly. Such interaction consists mostly direct appeals to politicians and bureaucrats (for services). In this sphere, ideology really doesn't matter so much. Ideology is not what can distinguish politicians in an authoritarian setting, where there is only one official version of things. What does matter is generosity: the services they are able to provide. Formal politics, then, is "reduced to distribution". (id.: 260) But as we've seen, it doesn't look much different in regards to the second respect, informal politics. People are making ends meet, not engaging in "political" struggle. So she asks the question, "Where do informal political and economic activities fall in this typology [of politics as intentional and public] if people who design informal networks never would suggest that they are intentionally influencing the choice of political leaders at any level of government?" (Singerman 1995: 6f.) In other words, political activity is not a matter of consciousness (nor contention), but rather just that: an activity that affects the status quo. It's in the effects of the things people do that the political lies<sup>168</sup>.

Yet, she does review quite extensively the values that people embrace in judging action in the neighbourhood social sphere – 'the community' – which are made up of the family ethos previously mentioned: values "of cooperation, arbitration, and association with trusted individuals". Moreover, she recognizes the potential 'political' nature of such values. For, as she argues, the values that sustain the family and the community

168 To drive the point home, Singerman echoes Scott: "The important variable in this discussion is not whether a man or woman "intends" to act politically but whether his or her actions, individually and cumulatively, actually influence the political order, the distribution and redistribution of public goods and services" (1995: 7). For example, the short-term saving schemes that people operate keep private resources within the community and outside the purview and grasp of the banking system and therefore the state (in the form of taxes), thus weakening the latter's resources base and reducing its clout and viability.

are “not solely expressed within the walls of their home” but “resonate upwards” into media and government when the latter are discussing issues that impact the family and people’s ability to sustain it. (id.: 71)<sup>169</sup> That is, the “community’s understanding of “the good,” of justice, and of fairness, based on widely shared consensus of values and norms” is also the basis on which “the *sha`b* judge national events and politics and envision a better Egypt” (id.: 43). In other words, she does recognize something like an ideology, but it never becomes quite clear in the book what role this plays in the practices of citizens and ideas of citizenship.

This is what we are ultimately interested in though. A more faithful anthropological account of (democratic) politics would take account of the multiple dimensions of people’s (embodied) membership of a political community. This starts by recognizing people’s political imagination as a vocabulary for their engagement with the state and the nation. As Singerman recognizes for repressive regimes, people have “subtle and creative ways” to express political beliefs (1995: 7). I would submit that people everywhere play subtly and creatively into the political culture of their country. In Beirut, I have shown two vocabularies, or styles of imagination. One is ruled by the master category of “civil society”, and another is characterized by the frame of “the people”. In the first, notions like democratization, transparency, and rights are important; in the second, order, community, and stewardship organize reflexive speaking about state and society.

We subsequently need to understand how such imagination feeds into how people are disposed to their political community. This is where we come back to the subject positions I identified: the citizen and the ordinary man. People self-identity as a “citizen” or as an “ordinary man” and they ascribe it to others whom they deem members of the same moral community, or call on them to take up that identity (especially in civil society, where being a citizen is a more like a project, always in need of renewal, in search for a more complete realization). Identifying with it, one speaks and acts from that position. Hirschkind’s (2001) analysis of circulating cassette sermons is attuned (get it?) to how morally laden subject positions relate to people’s sense of citizenship. Hirschkind did research in social contexts very similar to Singerman’s, but in contrast to her study, he zooms in on the moral universe of religious orthodoxy. In particular he examines the widely circulating cassette sermons that people listen to

169 This is also where her painstaking argument recurrently falls apart – the links between the local political institutions like kinship and translocal institutions remain suggestive, putative, not so much demonstrated.

and discuss amongst each other in order to identify and cultivate correct Muslim behaviour. A key aspect of such 'audition' is thus engaging others with its contents and appealing to them "to abide by Islamic moral standards" (Hirschkind 2001: 10) as well. Thus, Singerman's "popular sector" developed a kind of public. These cassette sermons "became the conceptual sites wherein the concerns, public duties, character, and virtues of an activist Muslim citizen were elaborated and practiced" (id: 11), especially in a context in which the Egyptian state could not offer such (conceptual, social, political) sites.

So while that public is primarily about being certain kinds of Muslims, it can also become about being a certain kind of Egyptian citizen. The public is "emergently" political in two ways. The first is tied to the form of discourse it promotes and makes possible, and thus a certain kind of subject. The preacher is the model here that listeners seek to emulate: "an active and concerned citizen, one who, having honed the skills of public concern and careful listening, is able, through example and persuasion, to move fellow Muslims toward correct forms of comportment and social responsibility" (2006: 131). The second lies in the content of the deliberations. While primarily about life in the neighbourhood, government policies can impact that life and as such draw reflections about their value and impact. Oftentimes these reflections were quite critical because the discourse diverged from key reigning moral notions about the nature of the Egyptian nation. Thus, "[w]hile participants of this movement clearly considered themselves to be Egyptian citizens, they also cultivated sentiments, loyalties, and styles of public conduct that stood in tension with the moral and political exigencies and modes of self-identification of national citizenship (id.: 116f.). Hirschkind therefore seems to draw attention to what Singerman also identified but tended to gloss over. His account does not reveal subaltern citizens who are merely concerned with "self-interest and resistance", but instead shows their active reflection in an alternative vocabulary from the standard "modern" (secular) Egyptian 'national citizen'.

Things look quite similar in Khandaq, actually. Subhi and Bilal looked at the world around them and decided to become different persons. While 'order' was an important trope to talk about society, it is significant that their turn to Abu Zalem and Hizbullah was primarily about getting their own lives in order. To take care of themselves and their family and be prepared for the worst. To be righteous persons. It got them self-respect, in part through the respect they earned from others. They are, in the full sense of the world, moral subjects: in the light of "higher-order" values (Taylor) they undertake to discern right from wrong and enact that dis-

tion as their responsibility towards a community of mutually recognized equals (cf. Durkheim's moral members of society). Moreover, the respectability, and the recognisability it implies, point to the fact that, not unlike Hirschkind's "activist Muslim" Egyptian citizens, this disposition forms a behavioural template for other members of the public as well (even if its emulation isn't so proactively encouraged as in the cassette sermon public). "Order" bolsters a language of citizenship.

Speaking such a language – taking up the subject position (both discursively and bodily) – establishes and consolidates other dimensions of that subjective disposition: affects like aspirations or anxiety; as well as forms of engagements with others, the kinds of claims one makes from institutions (cf. Tilly 2008), or models for action in certain situations. To take this back to Khandaq, these dimensions are mostly tied into the community and life in the neighbourhood. Fear for war, worries about making ends meet, indignation at the plight of the good but poor people, placing one's hope in – or gaining some sense of control over the future by joining – the Resistance. People have to wage other options to make ends meet (like changing houses), and try to 'be ready' (to run towards commotion) and be a steward to the community and to neighbours (exercise neighbourliness). They work to have things 'in order' and expect others to do so as well.

To understand this complex of language, affect and practice it remains crucial to take into account the (material) context in which people speak and act. In Chapter 4 it became clear that Khandaq residents' identification with 'the people', and the critical moral horizon it offered, in part grew out of the space between state and communal (party) claims to sovereignty and authority. In veering between (allegiance to) these claims by political parties and various institutions of the state<sup>170</sup>, (marginal) residents in Khandaq formulate their political imagination and learn to address political institutions. This governmental situation constitutes the "arena" or "space" for such political subjectivity. What does this look like for 'civil society'? Firstly, 'civil society' provides two kinds of arena that structure people's subjectivity: one arena consists of public gatherings; the other of private meetings. The public arena is ideologically primary. A large part of being part of 'civil society' consists of becoming a different type of moral subject: by cultivating a special public persona, able to debate issues in the appropriate manner, being "open" to (and curious about) others (from other 'walks of life'). These are the (discursive) prac-

170 Contextually varying, depending on what issue was at stake, whether that was planning, justice, public order, etc.

tices of a subject that desires to be proud of Lebanon, but experiences (and voices) exasperation and indignation about corruption and irresponsible sectarian leaders. Claims are made in public and are public claims, ideally. In addition to these discursive practices, being a civil subject is also about the knowledge one develops about knowing how to lobby, as well the network it requires one to nurture (with other NGOs, activists, and, especially, media). However, we have also seen that claims in the name of the public are at times made in private (backroom) settings. Doing so is a familiar template for strategic action, but depending on people's networks as well as how rooted one is in a civil subjectivity, it is not an easy one to execute. Yazigi and Hajj Ali are two examples of people who have neither network, disposition nor ideology for politicking (the razing of Sanayeh would have been the straw that broke the camel's back for Hajj Ali – in that moment of anger and frustration, she said would leave the country, after and in spite of all the years of activism and struggle. That would essentially be an admission that the political game is stronger than activism, and that she's unwilling or unable to play that game).

**Conclusion** This chapter identified two analytical problems: the current understanding of what subaltern (political) life looks like does not do justice to people's reflexivity; and the strategic ('political') action by members of civil society seemed to defy their own self-definitions and by extension our understanding of what civil society 'is'. The chapter subsequently proposed political subjectivity as an analytical lens that *would* be able to do justice to the complexities of each (political) universe. Let me review these three points.

As to the first point, it is in fact a dual argument. The first part argues that the political calculus that Chatterjee theorizes and describes is a rather poor conception of the stakes of "politics for most of the world" or the "governed", as he identifies them. We can see now that claiming to be "from the people" doesn't preclude a sense of (full-bodied) citizenship. Folks who speak from the position of 'the people' do in fact also claim citizenship, i.e. full membership of the nation (even if people in their civil counterpart don't always recognize that). It's 'simply' that their 'citizenship' is not so intimately tied to the word and concept of "citizen" itself, like it is in "civil society". In "civil society" it was tied to a complex or network of ideas and imagination that does trace its lineage directly to Hegel's idea of the citizen of the State. In Khandaq, however, people drew upon different discursive genealogies in order to articulate how they perceive and conceive their membership of society, and the norms they expect politicians and fellow citizens to abide by. The second part is that

even if one wants to understand but the calculus, you probably still need this thicker, ethnographic understanding of 'political society'. People's 'strategic' alliances probably aren't purely a game of chess. If you want to understand the logic of people's strategies, you will therefore also have to pay attention to more micro-level, everyday interactions between people, in which they cultivate their understanding of the world and its political players and forces.

What emerges out these interactions is a picture of people's ethical commitments to such players and forces, as shown also in Chapter 4. If we combine the picture from that and this chapter, it turns out that the related notions like 'political society' or 'popular politics', or 'informality', are somewhat misguided in two ways: in the assumption that there is a space outside the purview and clout of formal(izing) institutions and powers; and because subjects in these spheres or domains are conceived a little like marginal hustlers. As to the first point, in Chapter 4, I already noted that the presence of state and political parties (and their associated religious and charity institutions) in people's lives meant that the notion of a marginal or "peripheral" (Simone 2010) space of indeterminacy wasn't very helpful. This chapter fleshed out this proposition somewhat. Abu Zalem's personal war on drugs provides an indication that popular politics is usually not about maintaining or attaining autonomy from the political field. Instead, it is about navigating it, and entering into negotiation with it. An account of politics in the popular sector should thus start with the acknowledgment that these larger political entities are vitally present in people's everyday. While someone like Chatterjee surely does recognize they are there, interestingly, he doesn't follow up on that and investigate *how* they are part of people's lives.

In terms of the second problem – the paradigm of 'informality as the space of the hustler'–, in Chapter 4 I also drew attention to people's ideological commitments to the institutions of power. Again, this chapter fleshes out this proposition. The prototype of the hustler clearly doesn't make much sense in this case – you can understand very little of Subhi's or Bilal's lives through that lens. This has consequences for our understanding of informality and political society. Such notions become problematic, because one of the definitional boundaries they are (implicitly) founded on is in fact quite blurry. The moral work that people like Subhi and Bilal perform, in order to become self-respecting and respected members of the moral and political community, challenges the dividing line that for instance Singerman based her argument on. For one of the grounds for maintaining a distinction between a realm of formal and informal politics is the kind of political subjects that inhabit these realms, and these

turn out not to be so different. They challenge the more or less implicit notion that some people are tied more immediately to their concerns and, as a consequence, practice, perform or inhabit their citizenship differently from people who have some (juridical) platform to stand on that allows them to think about things and form an underdetermined political imagination. Marginalization from the state or the ('formal') political sphere does not mean that people are reduced to the barest of political action.

I do not mean to imply that the whole notion of 'informality' is vacuous, merely to say that it's probably not what we think, based on how it has been used thus far. To take up Chatterjee once again, the dynamics he describes do exist; clout based on state authority and clout based on reputation and militia back-up *are* different, but we need to contextualize them more properly. A different analytical language may help to rethink such a notion. When you examine the world from the perspective of people's subjectivities, for example, one fares better with these complexities and contradictions. The crux is to not take the logics as the defining characteristics, because people's lives aren't defined by just the one logic. Instead analysis of subjectivity pushes one to attend to the material context of people's actions and to see how affect, knowledge, and practice follow from the interplay. Dichotomies are not the likely result of such an enterprise. Instead, it generates questions like how are people's actions situated in each given context? What grounds for evaluation and justification do people put forward (for example, do they invoke rights or the survival of the community?); what is the nature of the political relationality (are people collectively represented, or do they connect to leaders and key officials on an individual basis? Is their relation to the political field mediated by institutions or by individuals?); what organizational commitments do they have or what modality of mobilization do they engage in (do they engage in street politics, organize manifestations or network through social media)? By stripping down the political society and civil society dichotomy to their constituent dimensions, you take first steps to figuring out how people incarnate the political field of their world and create a different basis for comparison.

In the Conclusion, I sum up what that kind of analysis results in, in terms of our understanding of Lebanese citizenship: how people understand their position in society, what they expect from the state, and which forms of everyday reflexive living sustain these notions.



# Conclusion

I set out this book to answer the question how (Beirut) Lebanese relate to sectarianism, as the dominant political vocabulary and reality. In so doing, I sought to understand people's political subjectivity, that is, how they understand and practice their membership of the political community. With Ortner (2005), I understood subjectivity to arise at the conflux of people's imagination (or "consciousness", as Ortner herself put it); the affective states at the root or conjured by that imagination; as well as practices, in particular those that relate people to other members and political institutions. I focused on two sets of people, two sets of practices: one rooted in civil society activities, another in neighbourly associations in a popular area. In what follows, I synthesize my findings into an overview of two overarching ways of relating to sectarianism and the subjectivities they allow people to cultivate.

Political imagination is a shared 'way of knowing' (Ortner) that is essentially evaluative in nature. Political subjectivity emerges in the process of formulating these evaluations. In these Lebanese cases, people's evaluation of political actors, programmes and state performance ultimately comes down to an evaluation of the political system that undergirds all events and actions: 'sectarianism'. Sectarianism can be characterized as a political philosophy that divides up the world into a state, religious communities and subjects, classifies these subjects as citizens to a large extent through their membership of said religious communities, and posits that certain political elites are expected to mediate state, community and subject-citizen. As I posited at the outset, and as has become clear, this philosophy has been deeply compromised. It had always been controversial, in a fundamental sort of way because of the rallying cry of Arab Nationalism, but also pragmatically because the particular divisions of power and privileges between the sects were always contested. The civil war and its 'sectarian' excesses made it morally suspect though. In addition, this "system" (*nizām*) has become the primary obstacle imagined by those who entertain developmentist dreams for Lebanon (especially the youth). Yet, Lebanon is still a 'sectarian' country. Sectarianism is still the only widely shared vocabulary to talk about political issues and the

default set of practices to tackle them. That begs the question what alternative vocabularies people have at their disposal to take critical distance and formulate their contestation of this 'system'.

As it turns out, each style of imagination offered its own way of relating to sectarianism. The people in 'civil society' seek to place themselves outside of sectarianism, both symbolically (for instance by framing themselves as 'madani' – a 'secular' kind of civil – which is different from 'ahli' – a *confessional* civil), as well as, to a certain extent, materially (in the religiously unmarked character of the spaces where they gather most). Framing themselves as 'outside' does not necessarily imply an adversarial stance, but primarily a neutral or autonomous space outside of the institutional nodes of power that are associated with the political status quo – that is, outside of the domain of political parties and beyond the confessional institutions. This is a space to meet other 'citizens' as well as a space from which to engage the state and pressure politicians to change the state, substantively. People from Khandaq, by contrast, place themselves squarely at the centre of these 'sectarian' relations. They are wary of, or simply do not understand, those who oppose sectarianism in a pure form, by advocating 'secularism'. They regularly align themselves with the political parties of their confession, and express no need to distance themselves from their sectarian position and their confessional institutions per se. Such a stance is in part a corollary of where these interactions happen: in the neighbourhood, a confessionally marked space. Within this position in a sectarian world though, they do shift alignments between parties or negotiate the extent of that alignment with the party of their favour. They may also well have their doubts about the direction of religious leadership, as witnessed in the controversies over Ashura. Moreover, they are acutely attuned to politicians (or religious leaders) who abuse religious differences or seek to enlarge their confessional clout in the state. In other words, they display an ambivalent engagement with the representative institutions of the sectarian system. As to the state, they have an ambiguity that follows from that. They can at times be quite adversarial or oppositional, they can deplore it, but they do so because they believe in its idea. The ensemble of these alignments and stances is intimately tied up with the notion of (being part of) 'the people'.

'Civil society' and 'the people' function as imagined moral communities to each grouping, respectively. They are master categories that anchor a number of other important values and ideas. For residents of Khandaq, being part of the people means that one tends to have a strong sense of (in)justice and looks toward strong leadership to set things right and straighten out those who profit over the backs of ordinary men and women. For partici-

pants of 'civil society', dialogue, openness (of people) or transparency (of governance), and 'citizenship' are important critical and mobilizing terms they often deploy. Each moral community thus supplies a vocabulary and ethical baseline with which people can take critical distance and evaluate what happens on the political stage, or how citizens relate to each other.

What does imagining oneself as part of such a community do for one's political subjectivity? In imagining these moral communities, what hope do people express, where do people see their role in society, and what is it like to fulfil it? The answer to that question needs to start with the observation that, with post-war politicization of the country's political system, people also call into question their membership of the political community. What kind of citizens people are, and how they relate to state and nation, are perennial subjects of their reflexivity. How people work out that question, and how it works out for them, so to speak, varies. In civil society, there is a recurrent sense of not achieving anything. I've heard many people express this feeling: it's an uphill battle. Battles *were* won (the campaign for local elections in 1998; the extraordinary solidarity and organizational frenzy during the Israeli siege in 2006), and these wins have been energizing. But as an employee of Nahwa al-Muwatiniya once told me, *it seems like recently, all we ever seem to do is score points on the side bets. All that really matters is entrenched too deeply, defended too staunchly by the powers that be for us to change it.* This feeling does result in despondency and the even the occasional break-down among employees and activists. New blood concomitantly tends to mean new energy. The Yes to Dialogue sessions about three generations looking at the civil war ("it's not just a hiwar, it's an event..."), discussed in Chapter 5, was set up by a new coordinator of the program, who wanted to bring new flair to the initiative. Stamina is thus a requisite attribute; attrition is fact of civil life. A different complicating factor is that the fight is, by its very nature, fraught. The 'vested interests' in the state cannot be fought head on, for fear of losing what is most valuable – one's own impartiality. Confessional *society* meanwhile is not to be fought at all. It is to be coaxed, convinced and to be cooperated with. However, common wisdom dictates that the more deeply people are steeped in confessional society, the more difficult this becomes. Still, despite these intrinsic obstacles, people do have energy. Or rather, there are constant calls to renew that energy – to mobilize one's indignation or to channel one's idealism. Fadi Shayya's letter to address the potential destruction of the Sanayeh park may serve as an example ("every concerned citizen is urged" to participate in the "civil action" in order to "lobby" and "advocate green areas, open spaces, public spaces, heritage, and most importantly citizenship in Beirut". It is significant, by

the way, that 'citizenship' is the language in which such calls are couched, in one way or another.) Indignation (and sometimes concomitant anger) is an affective state that often recurs, and one that is cultivated. (Yet not all is serious – many initiatives tend in fact to be ludic, such as the populous 'secularism marches': for the 2010 edition various people dressed up as if to go a wedding of the civil marriage that didn't exist. A smaller initiative, 'Critical Mass' bike tours (Beirut edition) were meant to address environmental issues and cars' suffocating hold on the city, but were equally about the pleasure of biking. There was therefore also a sense that positivism should be the engine of mobilization and protest.)

On the Khandaq side, collective mobilization is not a thing. That changes the affective dynamic considerably. However, passivity is not the alternative of mobilization. Their engagement with the world takes two forms. One is the kind of reflexivity they rehearse in daily conversations with neighbours, and the emotions that befit that. Indignation, at the failed state, at (morally) corrupted leaders is a central, recurring emotional state. For most though, that state isn't paired with the attempt to affirm and strengthen one's agency. (In fact, I would venture it is coupled with powerlessness more often than not; even as hope may be placed in the political party). The other forms of engagement are concrete interventions, whether that be on individual initiative or in concerted action. The Hizbullah recruits are a special example of this. They are definitely part of something bigger, something collective – they go to training sessions, religious schooling and on a more informal and somewhat ad hoc basis become part of pan-urban networks that promote security or civil peace. That creates a sense of a kind of agency perhaps absent for most people. That level and extent of 'engagement' is rather rare also. Many youth are involved with the party most present on the ground, Amal. From what it seems, that may not amount to much, structurally, but they can be called to do odd jobs as the occasion requires. (And senior party members from the neighbourhood will have greater (moral) authority for them.) People have other ways of engaging on a neighbourhood level as well. They might participate in the administration of a charity organization, or maintain public space out of pocket (and in one's own time). The Hizbullah guys are also active in this space – especially as small big men who get to intervene in disturbances of the peace. What kind of disposition does this engender? Subhi phrased it quite aptly: it's all about being 'attentive' or 'alert', that is, being on the lookout to enact one's responsibility. Sometimes there is some 'strongman' component in taking up responsibility, when a man has to assert his street cred and authority. That requires its own kind of cultivation of affective states. Most of the people though practice smaller and per-

haps less spectacular forms of responsibility. They are good neighbours, and are alive to opportunities to perform little acts of kindness, which they understand as sticking together, out of duty or solidarity, as neighbourhood, as community, or as the disinherited people.

While thus far I have stressed the differences between these two styles of imagination, I need to provide two qualifications of these differences. One is that these are not properties inherent to people, but in significant part properties of the settings in which these forms of knowledge are produced and shared. Thus, being in public fosters a 'public' type of talking about the state. The public culture of civility that precludes naming and identifying helps reproduce an imagination of the state and democracy in which a state weakened by generic forces of sectarianism and related nepotism may be coaxed into functioning as a generally responsive and representative body, with the help of smart campaigns, the right network and, of course, a bit of luck and a lot of persistence. Outside of this domain of civil activism, however, things might well look different for the same people. They may have to negotiate confessional realities in their private lives in way that would not live up to their civil ideas elsewhere. Dealing with different allegiances in the family, especially come voting time (where the father or an uncle might pledge the family's votes), financial support for one's education, or even dealing with exigencies for marriage. It might also be that as soon as the norms of public civility cease to be contextually relevant, people, in situations they consider private, may me quite specific in the address of their incriminations of the political field.

Such incrimination are well within the field of the possible and in fact quite common in Khandaq. There, public intimacy creates the image of a state weakened by specific forces and particular politicians. As above though, outside of this particular neighbourhood setting, especially in places that involve strangers or people from various confessional backgrounds, the very same people may well subscribe to some form of non-descript civility. At the same time, one should not expect discursive behaviour to be wholly determined by context. One of my main arguments is that ways of talking and participating in public (also publically intimate) interactions sediment over time into a political subjectivity. In other words, 'subjectivity' as shared ways of knowing also consolidate to various extents in embodied, 'individual' subjectivities. Thus the extent to which certain discursive practices 'travel' depends on how much someone has internalized these practices and the values they index as well as her judgment about how contextually appropriate or felicitous they would be.

The second qualification is of a different nature. Besides the differentiations I've discussed in extenso, there is also an elementary resemblance

between the two, a semblance of which the differences are merely diverging elaborations. Through both styles of imagination, people expect more from the state. In fact, they expect something quite similar from the state. The difference in the way that residents in Khandaq talk about the state vis-à-vis people in 'civil society' derives from their different position on sectarianism – from whether they 'stand' outside or inside it. For 'civil society' folks, the state needs radical reform. For Khandaq residents, the state just needs to do what it is called to do (rather than being subverted by corrupt elites from its purpose (the purpose it is already endowed with)). In civil society, people will emphasize the need to be treated as individuals, as 'citizens', equally across the board, whereas in Khandaq, people will sooner couch a language of economic justice in communitarian language, that the state should make sure none of the sects are left behind. In essence though, a similar desire emerges. Both expect the state to play fairly, to be a guarantor of the *communitas* of the nation, to ensure a fundamental equality between members of the political community – or, put differently, to uphold what was for Hegel (cf. Avineri 1974) the universally altruistic logic of the State (and which is perhaps the fundamental state idea that most people around most of the world cherish).

Obviously, it is also quite clear to Lebanese that the Lebanese state is not very successful in guaranteeing that universal logic. In part, it is unable to transcend particular interests – among them primarily sectarian interests – because it also incarnates those very religious differences: the entire political and bureaucratic system is premised on a division of the polity into sectarian factions. That sets up contradictions that provides fertile ground for the kinds of ambivalence towards and frustration with the state that people voice. (Hence people have a more fundamentally ambivalent attitude about the state than the one that Hansen [2013] identified in India. The corruption of its idea is endemic, not epiphenomenal.) For people in Khandaq the sectarian system provides a cover for politicians who act on behalf of particular interests, whether that be collective (sectarian) ones or their own selfish pursuits (of material gain, usually). Civil society folks will say it not only provides cover for, but encourages such actions. In addition, the power adjudicated to religious institutions (like courts for 'civil' law) limits personal freedom (it complicates cross-sectarian marriage), and the idea that the state differentiates between different *kinds* of citizens is fundamentally wrong and divisive. For this reason, in civil society most people have turned that frustration into a wholesale rejection of the current system that produces such 'contradictions'. In Khandaq's public discourse, ambivalence remains characteristic, as abolishment is generally perceived as (coming from actors who are) anti-religious and

as something that will weaken the confessional communities (and thus amplify the precarity of its members' lives).

The common ground between the two styles does make clear that territoriality is not a helpful lens through which to look at Beirut's social and political landscape, at least if one wants to understand the perspective of its residents. For many a commentator sectarianism and territoriality were basically the same thing: the territory is where people close themselves off in pure sectarian spaces. Clearly, that is not a helpful way of understanding the role of "sectarianism" in people's lives. First of all, the 'territory' of the neighbourhood is a space in which the presence of both state and political parties precisely prompt questions about relations between community life, political leadership and state authority. Secondly, the commitment to the state – as incarnation and guarantor of the Lebanese nation – transcends any simple sectarian allegiance people might have. In other words, while people in Khandaq do situate their identities primarily vis-à-vis the political (and religious) leadership of the 'sectarian' community to which they are assigned from birth onwards, they also do so vis-à-vis that 'overarching' institution of the state, that ideally cross-cuts or stands 'above' the religious differences.

Casting this territorial-sectarian lens aside then, what does it mean to be a citizen of Lebanon? Based on this research, for many, it means to strive for something. In Khandaq, many strive to be a steward, whether to others (in the neighbourhood) or to their (confessional) community. In 'civil society', most strive for a more wholesome relationship between state and society as well as for greater unity in society. 'Civil society' is actually meant to cultivate this struggle, as a principle. Among 'the people', only some (like the Hizbullah guys) are engaged in relations that seek to purposefully enhance their agency, by providing tools to better oneself and one's community. Others (Ragheb et al, Abu Ali) are less purposive and let the *appèl* of others spring them into action. For many like them, but also for many of the more passive participants in civil society events, citizenship is more about longing than it is about striving, though. Longing for a Lebanon that – hope against all hope – may fulfil its (glorious) promise. One's sense of citizenship, the ways one seeks to practice it, are obviously intimately connected to more daily struggles and deliberations. All this longing and/or striving happens while trying to make ends meet, or while trying figure out what future to build, especially for youth, who ask themselves whether or not to go abroad, and what career may be possible in Lebanon (including in civil society). In the context where the nature of the Lebanese polity is contentious, such questions are at once practical and fundamental.

# Coda

Throughout this thesis, I have repeatedly cautioned against (inadvertently) hypostatizing analytical categories and pointed out ‘some trouble with’ dichotomous categorizations specifically. Developments that occurred after my main fieldwork period illustrate this point in my own research. The two main categories I worked with – civil society and the people – turn out to refer to a social figuration that is itself far from stable as well. In particular, the models from the ‘Arab Spring’ seem to have instigated a fairly durable shift towards a more ‘activist’ approach in ‘civil society’. In the following I’d like to offer a glimpse of what that shift might be. Quickly after the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, there were a few substantial marches in Beirut, with protesters chanting the slogan “the people want the downfall of the sectarian regime”. This was of course a play on the ‘viral’ “the people want the downfall of the regime”. If the Lebanese version sounds a bit awkward, it is – also in Arabic. Gone is the cadence and the succinct punch. In an iconic type of way, that awkwardness signalled some of the problems this campaign faced. One problem was that it didn’t have one or two figureheads people could (agree and) focus on, who embodied ‘the regime’ and whose ‘downfall’ would symbolize the downfall of said regime. Of course, as developments notably in Egypt demonstrate, there’s a whole lot more regime than just the figureheads and the latter’s fall really is by itself more symbolic than anything else. In Lebanon however, this was clear from the start. The complexity of ‘the sectarian regime’, and the difficulty of “bringing it down” was immediately obvious. Its entrenchment in society was clear as well. Given people’s quite varied relations to the ‘sectarian’ figureheads (i.e. the leaders who survived the civil war to obtain key political positions), even a consensus about only a few figureheads would be quite difficult. The outcome of the demonstrations subsequently was hardly revolutionary, and the momentum got quickly lost.

Interestingly, when some of the activists who participated in the demonstrations came together in the French Institute (in March 2011) to reflect on ‘why the revolution had failed’, they identified a problem of yet another order. The meeting consisted of mostly young adults in the crowd, and a jury consisting of (young) organizers, an activist-academic and a veteran



leftist intellectual. While they did discuss the fact they lacked a proper target of protest (à la Mubarak), they also reflected on the fact that by copying the lexicon of the popular protests elsewhere in the Arab world, they had now imported the notion of “the people” into their activist vocabulary. Specifically, they realized they didn’t know how to actually reach said “people” (and mobilize them for their demonstrations). One result of these reflections was that various activists and NGO-workers subsequently moved to take up more popular stances. Notably, some started working on topics they perceived to be more in “the people’s” interest, such as healthcare, social security and the minimum wage (in contrast to such topics as ‘heritage’, which they would have perceived as a middle-class issue). There’s also been a shift in language use, particularly by putting greater emphasis on “rights”. Rights were always there – as key part of ‘citizenship’ – but social rights were now becoming more important (rather than, say, electoral rights). One may perhaps characterize the result as a blend of a ‘citizenship’ rights discourse and the idea of the people under threat. Moreover, with that shift, at least some members of civil society (like employees of NGOs) also adopted a more confrontational presence in the public sphere, becoming more ‘politicized’ in that sense.

An example of this shift toward social issues, couched in a discourse of rights, and in a direct appeal to a broader public, was the initiative ‘Haqqi Alayyi’. The name of the initiative is a play on words, as it could be translated as ‘my right depends on me’ and ‘it’s my fault’ (in Lebanese Arabic). The members of the initiative plastered the walls with posters, across Beirut, itself an innovation. The posters, written in dialect, were meant to inform people about their “social rights” (to healthcare, affordable prices for basic goods, public transport, fair and transparent taxes) and generate questions about why they had become “useless” in Lebanon. The thrust of the initiative’s discourse was strongly anti-corruption, now explicitly cast in the need for “regime change” rather than “reform”. Campaigners organized a number of events, most notably a sit-in at the ministry of health (in December 2011), with protesters lying down on its steps between corpses of cloth and paper to symbolize those who had died because of Lebanon’s lack of universal healthcare.<sup>171</sup> The initiative thus combined paradigms from ‘civil society’ (concern with the public good, like public transport; its modalities of mobilization, like “sit-ins”, creative and playful visual work, like the posters, or the corpses), a more radical outlook adopted from the revolutionary times, and a focus on issues important to

171 See Le Monde, 2012-01-07, Stephan; Al-Akhbar, 2011-12-13, Abu Zeki, Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HaqqiAlayyi> (accessed 2015-09-08)

ordinary people (public transport recast as 'social rights', rather than an environmental issue; social security and economic justice).

The Haqqi Alayyi people were fully expecting to be in it for the long haul. And the change they helped initiate does appear to have been substantive and durable. At the moment of wrapping up this book (September 2015), (violent) protests are taking place in Beirut that were sparked by mounting heaps of trash after the city's main garbage fill was sealed off by nearby residents. They did so after a deadline passed for the government to come up with a solution for the landfill, which had long exceeded maximum capacity. Garbage disposal is actually an old point of contention as large landfills constitute aesthetic and olfactory nuisances, pollute the environment, and present health risks. However, the file has lingered in government offices and has now come to a head with the frustration of those directly concerned. However, the issue lends itself well to much broader political contention: it combines preoccupation with state failure to 'take care' of its citizens, with political ineptitude and corruption, and worries about the environment. All of these aspects are cited by those drawn in to the protests. Participants cite the lack of running water and (uninterrupted) electricity in fact more often as reasons than garbage collection. Symptomatic of the more confrontational presence in the public sphere is that a core group of protesters and organizers uses this occasion to call for the resignation of government and – rhetorically – for all of the major sectarian 'figureheads' to resign from politics all together (and "all of them means all of them"). The open confrontation with government, including the willingness of some to physically confront security forces, seems an almost direct continuation from the politicization of civil society following the 'Arab Spring'.

At the same time, thus far the demonstrations have not drawn out great numbers people from outside the civil society sphere of influence. And when they do, there is some consternation and reticence about engaging them among a part of other protestors and sympathizers. Consternation about the level of 'excitement' and violence of some, and reticence about engaging people obviously from other backgrounds, uncertain about whether they are actually allies. So, on the one hand, the urgency is there, the issues do have broad appeal, and the demonstrations are the talk of the town. The "cry" of anger and frustration is what unites them and brings them into the same place. New connections and identities seem entirely possible. On the other hand, however, 'civil society's means of mobilization (channels and networks, protest language, alliances) do not appear to have changed significantly as of yet. It is still unclear therefore what this means for the relation between 'civil society' and 'the people', or whether these categories will even remain analytically viable.

# Appendix:

## Scope of the thesis

In this appendix I single out and discuss a few aspects of my methodology in more detail, so as to indicate the reach and limits of my research. These aspects are threefold: the first concerns the overwhelmingly discursive nature of the material; the second deals with categories and representativity in both my field sites; and the last is the role of gender in my fieldwork.

This is not an ethnography of great intimacy. I have not lived intensively with a small group of people and participated as much as possible in their daily activities. Instead I repeatedly visited a great number of people. I visited the events of the various NGOs I was interested in, I swam with the people of Ammar's distribution company or dropped by for some coffee, and regularly 'attended' Abu Zalem's tea group. In other words, I always caught distinctive glimpses of people's lives. Yet, there is method to this madness: I systematically visited each or most of the occasions these people met. I visited Abu Zalem's tea group nearly every day, swam and chatted with the guys a couple of times per week, and hardly missed any event of any of the NGOs or initiatives I was interested in. The result is an ethnography of publicity. Central in publicity is how words are produced, staged, shared and received. This is what I know and what I have analyzed. The interviews I did form a mere supplement to this. I've had recorded talks with the majority of the people involved in the organizations I've tracked; I've interviewed most of the people that I also saw regularly in Khandaq; and I've sought out organizations and individuals relevant to the issues that people – especially the civil society activists – were dealing with, notably politicians and bureaucrats. These interviews do provide a glimpse of people's non-public sides, or what goes on backstage, but not too much more than that, actually.

There are two consequences: One is that I rely on words a lot. It's about what people say they do, and how they say it, much less on what they then go on to do. While that constitutes a limitation, in many cases it is

a theoretical one – while, say, working at an NGO, participating in the day-to-day life of a charity organization, or going on ‘field’ trips with Abu Zalem would have undoubtedly enriched my understanding of many a thing, it would not necessarily change my understanding of exercises in political imagination. The second consequence may be, well, more consequential: I don’t have a really good insight into where and how the public things of this thesis are rooted in people’s lives. That could be a drawback if one wanted to understand what things political mean to people. Instead, I can only say something about the public – i.e., shared in real-time – forms of meaning-making.

A related dimension of the research is that it emphasizes cohesion over conflict, which is typically the kind of thing that stays under covers in public settings. I’ve shown the imagination of community, but much less the fraught relations with people who for some would ideally actually not be a part of that community. Take the people who looked down on those living in the sloppy looking, irregular Khatib building (whom they might lump together with the epithet “those refugees”), for example. But even people who live *inside* the building, like Subhi and Bilal, might make similar attempts at distinction (and distantiation) from others who live there – who, for example, are not ‘trying to be correct’. Or take the rivalries between Amal and Hizbullah, which can run deep. On occasion, Abu Zalem made quite derogatory remarks about Amal; and actually wanted to build his own small mosque across from his office, rather than going to the Shia mosque down the street, next to ‘the Amal guys’. Obviously, there are tensions in the neighbourhood. Again, they may not be as analytically relevant for the purpose of this thesis: the exercise of imaging a community serves a purpose that is to a good extent detached from the really-existing community. It is primarily a political discourse, aimed at the political field and a broader imagined public, not a communal discourse meant for each other. Still, one could imagine political and communal discourses becoming embroiled with each other. The (‘political’) language of community might deployed in conflict situations, like Abu Ali who deployed the language of neighbourliness or kinship to smooth over or hush conflict. Conversely, tensions might inform ‘community speak’. My hunch is that the embroilment would be a weak one, but given the nature of my research, I have no more than a hunch.

This last dimension takes me to the following point. I’m guilty of wilfully homogenizing my two groupings to a certain degree. In Khandaq I have neglected the Sunna somewhat and I have neglected what might be a Sunni perspective entirely. I have talked about several Sunnis, but always as ‘ordinary people’, never ‘as’ Sunnis, which is what I repeatedly have

done with my Shia informants. That is, I precisely tried to understand how Shia residents alternated between 'sectarian' and 'popular' perspectives on politics and society. Given that Sunna occupy today and have historically occupied a different position in the sectarian political economy, and because there are subsequently different communitarian stories about their place in the Lebanese nation, one may expect a different kind of alternation between 'sectarian' and 'popular' perspectives for Khandaq's Sunna (and this holds all the more for the Kurds). To highlight one potential difference, Shia's 'popular' perspective is backed up in a sense by political parties who have a discourse about ordinary folks (the disinherited and the disempowered). 'Ordinary' Sunna in Khandaq do not have such an ideological 'infrastructure'. That could have an impact on the way they discuss matters of "popular" interest that might well be relevant for my reflections in this thesis. However, I did not hang out long enough with enough of them to be able to say something sensible about that. As a consequence, they've become somewhat invisible. As regards my treatment of 'civil society', I have not discussed a subset of people who don't quite fall neatly in the 'civil society' category, even if they share venues, networks and ambitions. We might call them 'the activists' (though "activist", and its various Arabic equivalents, is deployed by a variety of participants in the field of 'civil society', albeit not without contestation). They are generally not tied to NGOs, they may be tied to left-wing or "secular" parties, or else operate 'independently', and do more political and topical 'actions', like demonstrations, rather than the more pacifying 'dialogue' type of activities. (Obviously, with the post-Arab Spring politicization – cf. Coda – that distinction becomes more muddled.) I mention both these analytical shortcuts, because I expect there is still a different story to tell there about political imagination, different from the two I have told. However, given that I did not make any real effort of integrating into events and activities of either 'subset', I did not feel confident discussing them in this thesis.

I can be quite brief about my last qualification. My account of Khandaq is rooted in male public sociality, period. I have no idea how a (perhaps more restricted) female publicity compares with this, nor have I any real clue about how these two worlds would intersect. In a conservative environment, women's spaces were not open to me and I got to know very few of them. I have visited a few people in their homes, but usually though not always I would stay in the 'public' sections of the house, where sociality was yet again focused on men. I suspect that access to that world would have gotten me a much better insight into the material of Chapter 4 – social regulation and the organization of the neighbourhood – and it may have changed my ideas about how political imagination is (can be) exercised in public.

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# Summary

This thesis examines what it may mean to be a citizen in Lebanon today. People seek to answer that question primarily in relation to the grand political compromise through which the country is ruled and the polity is organized: “sectarianism”. Sectarianism can be characterized as a political philosophy that divides up the world into a state, religious communities and subjects; classifies these subjects as citizens to a large extent through their membership of said religious communities; and posits that certain political elites are expected to mediate state, community and subject-citizen. That compromise solution for the country’s religious diversity has always been disputed, but it has become more deeply compromised with the “civil war” (1975-1990). In a brief summary of widely shared views, that war cast moral suspicion on the sect, as a potential source of hatred and violence. The fact that power and wealth are distributed on its basis only fuels the simmering flames. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, political leaders have failed to rebuild the country to its former Parisian (cultural) and Swiss (economic) glory. Their failure reflects badly on the political system, because, according to some, they can hide behind it for their pursuit for partisan and selfish interests, or, according to others, it may even actively encourage leaders to do so.

Very roughly, people’s positions on the system subsequently vary from a principled and radical denial of all things sectarian and the call for a ‘civil’ state, to a denunciation of others’ abuse of power in the name of sectarian rights or privilege, while still stopping short of calling the actual system into question. Regardless though, sectarian language and practice prevails. Whenever there’s a political controversy or deadlock, politicians go sit at “tables of (national) dialogue”, reshuffle their alliances, call on other leaders to moderate their language so as to not stir up sectarian trouble, and then, usually, come up with some compromise on how to redivide the stakes “horizontally” across interest groups of different sects. Analytically, that presents a somewhat disjointed picture: there is a political organization and vocabulary that is at once hegemonic (i.e., dominant and ineluctable) *and* widely critiqued, because it does not live up to people’s expectations or serve their needs. We thus need to under-

stand how people formulate these expectations and identify these needs in the shadows of the public and political status quo. They have do so in its shadows, because they need to construe the social and political world differently as a 'basis' for developing their critique of the sectarian system. This thesis is concerned with that alternative 'construction of reality', its conditions of possibility, and how it takes root in people's social and political engagement. It asks the following questions: what are the symbolic 'resources' people have at their disposal to take a critical stance, outside of the language of political sectarianism? What are the values that undergird them, and how can they enunciate, explicate and enact them? What does that do for the position they claim as members of the political community? What in other words, is their vocabulary of citizenship and political contention?

I begin the exploration of these questions by looking for answers in the sociological literature on Lebanon, and Beirut specifically. I focus on those works that in some way have addressed the question what the post-war reconstruction has been about. The emphasis is on the physical reconstruction of the city, but naturally physical reconstruction is inextricable from questions about political and social reconstruction (questions such as which state institutions should be (made) competent to regulate the process?; or what of the people who were displaced during the war?). Overwhelmingly, scholars have answered this question with "territoriality": reconstruction would have been about securing and reclaiming territory, for one's constituency or for one's business or political network. My question therefore at the end of that chapter, is how does 'territoriality' play out in my field sites and how would it factor into people's political imagination?

I answer those questions based on two case-studies. The first and primary site is a popular and largely working-class neighbourhood in the centre of Beirut, called Khandaq al-Ghamiq (Khandaq for short). Some 80% of the neighbourhood is Shia, 20% Sunni, most of whom are Arabic speaking Kurds. Much of social life takes place in the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood as lived space is strongly marked by the presence of both political parties and confessional institutions. The second case consists of a shifting but overall stable conglomerate of people who consider themselves to be part of 'civil society'. 'Civil society' is made up activities and events organized by NGOs as well as more topical and ephemeral collectivities and initiatives. Broadly, the aim of 'civil society' is to reform state and society. They strive for a more transparent and responsive state, and hope to help build cross-sectarian bridges between people. My empirical focus is on those kinds of initiatives that attempt to create new kinds of

public spaces, in which people may develop alternative reflections on the challenges facing Lebanon.

I start off my investigation in Khandaq. What is the role of territoriality in Khandaq and if any, how does it influence residents' political imagination? As to the role territoriality, Khandaq strikes a dissonant cord with the literature, for two reasons. Firstly, I show that after some 15 years of protection of the presence of Shia refugees in Khandaq, the Shia political parties change course, negotiate their evacuation and relinquish control over the area – counter to 'territorial' strategies that aim at preserving presence and control. Secondly, the production of new housing is a rather banal affair that involves small-time developers and entrepreneurs, and is sustained in part by investments by residents who hope to cash in on fast profits in a booming real-estate market. Political parties are absent in these transactions and residents do not politicize their work either. I draw two conclusions. The first is that territoriality as political logic is contextual, not a rule, as one could have deduced from the literature. The second is that even if people in Khandaq do show elements of a territorial imagination, it is not the basis of their politics or their position in the polity. From this second conclusion, I infer an additional consequence. Neo-Marxist urban sociology does not provide a helpful framework here to understand urban politics. That framework presumes the primacy of the economy for both urban development *and* the conflicts that arise out of that. In Khandaq, urban development was pushed by factors other than economic ones, and it did not lead to conflict. The case thus shows more complexity and muddles the Marxist analytical categories.

If neither space nor territory appear to be the dominant frame through which people from Khandaq see themselves as part of the body politic, then where *do* they situate themselves? As it turns out, at the intersection of state sovereignty and communal leadership. I arrive at that conclusion by examining the history and role of 'informal' and 'formal' institutions of governance in the neighbourhood. In particular I look at elected 'street level bureaucrats' called *mukhtars*; at local strongmen; and how each relate to the (central) state and (national) political leadership. The mukhtars have been pivots in a long-standing tug-of-war between local powers and the central state. Meant as the face of the central state who would establish its local authority, political leaders quickly attempted to subvert the post into their 'hand' into state resources and thus a mechanism to enhance their local power. Strongmen, in the meanwhile, especially during and after the war, served as another relay point between local constituencies and political parties, and competed with mukhtars as institutions of local governance. At stake in this evolving figuration, therefore, has been (state) sovereignty.

For residents of Khandaq that same question was at stake as well (as it is for many in Lebanon), and I argue that the presence and actions of the mukhtars and strongmen serve as material to reflect on that question, as well as to elaborate their ideas about the nature of the state and the political party more generally. These ideas are highly ambivalent. I show that on the one hand, such ambivalence draws on the discursive fodder that the notion of being but ordinary men – members of “the people”, good but disinherited – provides and the critical stances it sets up towards both entities. While residents are self-evidently part of the sectarian world, they are therefore not wholly subsumed by it. The chapter ends by comparing the ways people navigate that local political field with recent theory about the postcolonial state that takes fractured or uneven sovereignty as its starting point, and draws inspiration from Deleuze & Guattari’s ‘revolutionary’ theories of statecraft to think about how people in the margins ‘slip’ through the institutional ‘cracks’. My main argument here is that these cracks are not spaces of autonomy and relative freedom, but consist in fact of the symbolic and practical *alternation* between competing powers.

The question now is how does this compare with ‘civil society’? Moving into the second ‘case study’ enriches our understanding of the Lebanese political universe and throws in relief the kinds of ideas that people can have about citizenship within that universe. The main, overarching difference with Khandaq is how they conceive of, and entertain, their relation to ‘the sectarian world’. Whereas being part of that world was largely self-evident to people in Khandaq, in ‘civil society’ people take great pains to create an alternative, neutral space, outside of the sectarian universe. That neutral space is one of “citizenship” – being a ‘citizen’ means being undetermined by sectarian identity and allegiances. It also means not getting dragged into the ‘political’ mud. The aversion of ‘getting political’ is a typical characteristic of Beirut civil society, and actually draws from the fact that much of ‘civil society’ exists ‘in public’. Public society should be a civil society.

While it would thus seem as if we have two neatly separated worlds, I end the thesis by complicating the distinction. In so doing, I also provide a critical reading of various postcolonial scholars who distinguish between two forms of citizenship – one privileged and empowered, the other disinherited and marginal – as the basis for their understanding of the nature of postcolonial societies and politics. The chapter addresses and ethnographically explicates a dual problem that emerges from that distinction: the civil – privileged – kind of citizenship can’t live up to its ideal type, whereas the popular – marginal – kind amounts to much

more than the strategic logic of making-do to which it denizens are often reduced. The public ideals that 'civil society' entertains and cultivates are betrayed somewhat by the strategies NGO's and activists wind up resorting to in order to gain access to policy makers. Meanwhile, far from merely engaging in pragmatic exchanges with political parties in order to secure interests, the 'marginal' citizens in Khandaq have a rich ideological life and cultivate ethical commitments to shape their sense of citizenship and establish relations to the political field. Rather than staying with these classificatory dichotomies that fail to capture such complexities, I propose a reading of both these situations in terms of (political) subjectivity. Political subjectivity allows – and helps us to understand – both 'civil' desires and aspirations *and* pragmatic, contextual choices, on the one hand, and on the other, cautions us against reducing people to the barest of political strategies, and favours instead understanding them as full, moral subjects.

# Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt wat het betekent om vandaag de dag in Libanon een burger te zijn. Mensen pogen die vraag eigenlijk vooral te beantwoorden in verhouding tot het grote politieke verbond waar staat en natie georganiseerd door worden: het confessionalisme. Je kunt confessionalisme karakteriseren als een politieke filosofie die de wereld opdeelt in een staat, religieuze gemeenschappen en nationale onderdanen. Deze onderdanen verkrijgen voor een groot deel als slechts burgerschap voor zoverre ze aan hun lidmaatschap van een religieuze gemeenschap rechten en plichten ontleen. Ten slotte verordent deze filosofie dat politieke elites de relaties tussen staat, gemeenschap en onderdaan-burger bemiddelt. Dit compromis om de religieuze diversiteit van het land te pacificeren heeft altijd ter discussie gestaan, maar de “burgeroorlog” van 1975-1990 heeft het verder gecompromitteerd. Heel kort gezegd, voor veel mensen heeft de oorlog de religieuze gemeenschap moreel aangetast, als ware het een potentiële bron van haat en geweld. Dat macht en rijkdom op confessionele bases wordt verdeeld voedt de sudderende vlammen. Bovendien, en misschien nog wel belangrijkste van al, de politieke leiders hebben het land niet tot zijn voormalige Parijse (d.w.z., culturele) en Zwitserse (d.w.z., economische) glorie weten terug te brengen. Hun falen vindt neerslag in hoe mensen het politieke systeem waarnemen, omdat – volgens sommigen – zij zich erachter kunnen schuilen terwijl ze hun partijdige en zelfzuchtige belangen nastreven, of – volgens anderen – het systeem zulk gedrag in leiders zelfs aanmoedigt.

Ruwweg variëren meningen over het systeem van, aan de ene kant, aanklachten tegen hoe sommigen in naam van confessioneel recht of privilege hun macht misbruiken, zonder daarmee het systeem zelf in vraag te willen stellen, tot een principiële en radicale afwijzing van alles wat met confessionalisme te maken heeft en de daarbij horende eis om een ‘civiele’ staat in het leven te roepen, aan de andere kant. Ondanks dergelijke kritieken floreert confessioneel taalgebruik en confessionele politieke praktijken. In het geval van een politieke controverse of impasse, schuiven politici samen aan “de tafel van de (nationale) dialoog”, ze herschikken hun allianties, roepen andere leiders op om hun taal te mati-

gen zodat ze geen confessionele onrust stoken, en komen meestal dan wel op een compromis dat belangen “horizontaal” tussen verschillende belangengroepen en religieuze gemeenschappen herverdeelt. Analytisch gezien presenteert die twee gegevenheden een wat verwarrend beeld: er is een politieke organisatievorm en taal die *zowel* dominant en onvermijdbaar zijn, *en* breed bekritiseerd worden omdat ze niet aan de verwachtingen van mensen voldoen en in hun behoeftes voorzien. Ons staat dus te begrijpen hoe mensen ondanks die onvermijdbare dominantie hun verwachtingen kunnen formuleren en behoeftes kunnen identificeren. In de schaduwen van het politieke status quo moeten ze de sociale en politieke wereld anders indelen en opbouwen, als een basis om hun kritiek op het confessionele systeem te ontwikkelen. Dit proefschrift houdt zich bezig met die alternatieve ‘constructie van de werkelijkheid’, met haar mogelijkhedenvoorwaarden, en hoe ze vorm krijgt in het sociale en politieke engagement van mensen. Het stelt daarmee de volgende vragen: wat zijn de symbolische ‘middelen’ die mensen tot hun beschikking hebben om een kritische positie in te nemen, buiten de taal van het politiek confessionalisme? Welke zijn de waarden die daaraan ten grondslag liggen, en hoe kunnen zij deze uiten, uiteenzetten en er gevolg aan geven? Wat betekent dat voor de plek die ze opeisen als leden van politieke gemeenschap? Anders gezegd, wat is hun vocabulaire van burgerschap en politiek geschil?

Ik begin een eerste verkenning van deze vragen door bij de sociologische literatuur over Libanon en Beiroet in het bijzonder ten rade te gaan. Ik richt me daarbij vooral op literatuur die zich bezig heeft gehouden met de vraag wat er nu eigenlijk met de naoorlogse wederopbouw is gebeurd. De nadruk ligt hier op de fysieke wederopbouw van de stad, maar die is natuurlijk onlosmakelijk verbonden met vragen over politieke en sociale wederopbouw (vragen zoals welke overheidsinstellingen het proces moeten reguleren, of wat er met de vele mensen moet gebeuren die tijdens de oorlog ontheemd zijn geraakt). De overgrote meerderheid van wetenschappers hebben die vraag met het begrip “territorialiteit” beantwoord: de wederopbouw diende vooral het verzekeren of terugwinnen van territorium voor de politieke achterban of het zakelijke netwerk. Aan het eind van het eerste hoofdstuk stel ik dus de vraag: hoe is ‘territorialiteit’ aanwezig in de locaties van mijn veldwerk en wat voor invloed heeft dit op de politieke verbeelding van de mensen aldaar?

Die vraag beantwoord ik via twee gevalsstudies. De eerste en meest belangrijke locatie is een volkswijk in het centrum van Beiroet, genaamd Kandaq al-Ghamiq (Khandaq in het kort). Zo’n 80% van de buurt behoort tot de Sjiitische gemeenschap, en 20% tot de Soennitische, waarvan het



merendeel Arabisch sprekende Koerden zijn. Een groot deel van het sociale leven vindt in de buurt plaats. Die buurt krijgt een duidelijke stempel van de aanwezigheid van politieke partijen en confessionele instellingen. Het tweede geval bestaat uit een wisselende maar grotendeel stabiele verzameling mensen die zich tot 'civil society' rekenen. 'Civil society' bestaat uit activiteiten en evenementen die worden georganiseerd door ngo's of meer kortstondige collectiviteiten en initiatieven. Globaal genomen is het doel van 'civil society' staat en maatschappij te hervormen. Haar voorstanders streven naar een meer transparante en ontvankelijke staat en ze hopen over confessionele scheidslijnen bruggen te bouwen. Binnen dit geheel heb ik mij vooral gericht op initiatieven om nieuwe publieke ruimtes te creëren, waarin mensen op alternatieve wijzen zich zouden kunnen bezinnen op de uitdagingen waar Libanon mee geconfronteerd wordt.

Ik begin mijn onderzoek in Khandaq. Speelt territorialiteit een rol in Khandaq en zo ja, hoe beïnvloedt dit de politieke verbeelding van zijn bewoners? Wat betreft het eerste deel van die vraag luidt Khandaq een dissonante toon in de literatuur, en wel om twee redenen. Ten eerste laat ik zien dat de Sjiitische politieke partijen, na 15 jaar het hand boven de hoofden van Sjiitische vluchtelingen in de buurt te hebben gehouden, hun beleidskoers wijzigen, over de termen van hun evacuatie onderhandelen en daarmee hun controle over het gebied opgeven – in weerwil dus van 'territoriale' strategieën die erop geënt zijn aanwezigheid en controle te bestendigen. Ten tweede is de productie van nieuwe woningen een tamelijk banale affaire waar kleine ontwikkelaars en ondernemers zich op hebben gestort en wiens werk gedeeltelijk mogelijk wordt gemaakt door investeringen van bewoners, die hopen met sterk stijgende woningprijzen snelle winst te kunnen maken. Politieke partijen zijn in deze transacties afwezig en bewoners politiseren hun werk verder ook niet. Uit deze twee contrasten met de literatuur trek ik twee conclusies: de eerste is dat territorialiteit als politieke logica afhankelijk van context is en niet als een regel geldt, zoals men had kunnen afleiden van de Beiroetliteratuur. De tweede is dat alhoewel mensen in Khandaq elementen van een territoriale verbeelding tonen, die niet de basis van hun politiek, noch van hun verbeelde plek in de politieke gemeenschap is. Uit deze tweede conclusie trek ik nog een verder gevolg. Neomarxistische stadssociologie biedt hier geen nuttig kader om stedelijke politiek te begrijpen. Dat kader gaat ervan uit dat de economie hoofdzakelijk stadsontwikkeling en de daaruit resulterende stedelijke politiek drijft. In Khandaq werd stedelijke ontwikkeling door andere dan economische factoren gedreven en leidde niet tot politisering en conflict. Dit geval toont dus meer complexiteit en verknoot de Marxistische analytische categorieën.

Als dus stedelijke ruimte noch territorium het dominante schema verschaft aan de hand waarvan mensen zich binnen de natie plaatsen, waar situeren zij zich dan wel? Het onderzoek wijst op het spanningsveld tussen staatssoevereiniteit en gemeenschappelijk autarkie. Die conclusie dringt zich met name op na analyse van de (historische) rol van 'informele' en 'formele' machtsmechanismen in de buurt. In het bijzonder heb ik gekeken naar verkozen eerstelijnsambtenaren (zogenaamde *mukhtars*); naar lokale leiders (*strongmen*); en naar hoe elk zich verhoudt tot de (centrale) overheid en (nationaal) politiek leiderschap. De mukhtars zijn de spil geweest in een oude touwtrekwedstrijd tussen lokale machten en de centrale staat. De functie was in het level geroepen om als gezicht van de centrale staat te dienen en haar autoriteit te vestigen, maar politieke leiders probeerden al snel de rollen om te draaien en de post te gebruiken als vinger in de overheidspap en dus als een middel om hun lokale macht te vergroten. De lokale sterke mannen waren, met name tijdens en na de oorlog, een tweede relais tussen lokale achterban en politieke partij, en concurreerden met de mukhtars voor macht en invloed. In deze steeds verschuivende figuratie staat (staats-) soevereiniteit dus steeds op het spel.

Diezelfde vraag staat voor bewoners van Khandaq (en voor vele anderen in Libanon) ook op het spel en ik betoog dat de aanwezigheid en handelingen van de mukhtars en de lokale leiders daarover verdere stof tot nadenken bieden en leiden hen tot verdere reflectie over de aard van de (Libanese) staat en de politieke partij überhaupt. Hun ideeën hierover zijn ambivalent. Ik laat zien dat aan de ene kant zulke ambivalentie gevoed wordt door de notie slechts gewone mensen te zijn – leden van "het volk", goedaardig maar misdeeld. Dit creëert ruimte voor een kritische houding ten opzicht van beide entiteiten. Alhoewel de bewoners dus als vanzelfsprekend deel van de confessionele wereld uitmaken, worden ze daar geenszins geheel door en in opgenomen. Op deze constatering laat ik een vergelijking volgen met recente theorievorming over de postkoloniale state. Auteurs in deze traditie nemen een gebroken of partiële (staats-) soevereiniteit als hun uitgangspunt en laten zich inspireren door Deleuze & Guattari's 'revolutionaire' theorieën over staatskunst om te begrijpen hoe mensen in de marges door de 'mazen' van het institutionele net 'glippen'. Mijn hoofdargument is hier dat deze 'mazen' geen plaatsen van autonomie of relatieve vrijheid zijn, maar ontstaan uit de wisselingen van allianties met concurrerende machtsblokken.

De vraag die zich nu opdringt is hoe dit zich met 'civil society' laat vergelijken. Door naar deze tweede 'gevalsstudie' te gaan, kunnen we ons begrip van het Libanese politieke universum verrijken en reliëf geven aan de soort van ideeën die mensen over burgerschap binnen dat uni-

versum kunnen hebben. Het belangrijkste, overkoepelende verschil met Khandaq is hoe mensen in 'civil society' hun relatie tot de 'confessionele wereld' begrijpen en vormgeven. Terwijl het in Khandaq grotendeels vanzelfsprekend is om deel van die wereld uit te maken, doen mensen in 'civil society' grote moeite om een alternatieve, neutrale plek buiten het confessionele universum te creëren. Die neutrale plek is dat van "burgerschap"; burger zijn betekent vooral zich niet laten bepalen door confessionele identiteit en loyaliteiten. Het houdt ook in dat je zorgt dat je niet afglijdt naar 'politieke' modder. De afkeer van 'politiek' is karakteristiek voor Beiroets civil society en put kracht uit het feit dat veel van 'civil society' in het openbaar 'bestaat'. De openbare burgermaatschappij moet een geciviliseerde maatschappij zijn.

Het lijkt op dit moment dat we twee netjes van elkaar gescheiden werelden – en vocabulaires van burgerschap – aangetroffen hebben. Ik eindig het proefschrift echter door het onderscheid te vertroebelen. Terwijl ik dit doe, geef ik een kritische lezing van verscheidene postkoloniale wetenschappers die een onderscheid maken tussen twee vormen van burgerschap – één geprivilegieerd en mondig, een tweede misdeeld en marginaal – en dit als basis nemen voor hun begrip van postkoloniale samenlevingen en politiek. Met behulp van etnografische illustraties kaart ik een probleem aan, dat uit dit onderscheid volgt: het burgerlijke – geprivilegieerde – soort burgerschap kan zijn ideaalbeeld niet waarmaken, terwijl het volkse – gemarginaliseerde – soort veel meer is dan het strategische eindjes-aan-elkaar-knopen waartoe het vaak wordt gereduceerd. Het ideaal van de openbare burgermaatschappij dat 'civil society' voorstaat wordt nog wel eens in de steek gelaten wanneer ngo's en activisten toegang het beleidsproces proberen te verzekeren. Ondertussen doen de 'gemarginaliseerde' burgers in Khandaq veel meer dan pragmatische deals sluiten met politieke partijen teneinde hun belangen veilig te stellen; zij onderhouden een rijk ideëel leven en vormen een ethisch engagement en geven zodoende gestalte aan hun gevoel van burgerschap en hun relaties met het politieke veld. In het licht van dergelijke complexiteiten kunnen we ons analytisch met dichotomieën niet meer dan behelpen. Ik stel daarom een nieuwe lezing van beide situaties voor en wel in termen van (politieke) subjectiviteit. Het concept politieke subjectiviteit kan *zowel* de 'burgerlijke' verlangens en idealen *als* de pragmatische, contextuele keuzes omvatten en helpen begrijpen. Daarnaast hoedt het ons mensen tot naakte politieke strategieën te reduceren en moedigt het ons in plaats daarvan aan om hen als volle (en volbloedige) morele personen te zien.

This thesis examines what it means to be a citizen in Lebanon today. People address and answer that question primarily in relation to the dominant political system and culture of the country: sectarianism. Sectarianism is a political system that divides up the world into a state, religious communities and subjects. These subjects are citizens to a large extent via their membership of said communities and their relations to the state are mediated by political elites on the community level. While dominant, the system is controversial. Many aren't satisfied with how it formulates the responsibilities of the state, frames people's identity in relation to their religious community, or how it deals with social inequality.

While these are 'Lebanese' questions, the story this book tells is in many ways a Beirut one. Not only do people take the city as an object to reflect on these questions, but the city's spaces also influence how people come to talk about them. The book follows two sets of such people. One mostly young, mostly highly educated activists and NGO employees who try to change the future of the country; the other residents of a mostly working-class neighbourhood in the centre of town, who cultivate intimate public relations with neighbours and colleagues in between and after work, on and just off the street. Each set of people entertains different ways of talking about their place in the polity. The book shows where these differences come from and suggests how we might understand them.